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## **Struggling to find solutions: Liberian refugees in Ghana**

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## **Introduction**

This paper investigates the challenges of resolving the protracted Liberian refugee situation in Ghana. Despite the restored stability in Liberia and the unfavourable living conditions in exile, as of 2011, there were still about 11,000 Liberian refugees in the Buduburam refugee settlement in Ghana. For the last several years, the volume of humanitarian aid for this refugee population has been sharply dwindling whereas refugees' livelihoods have been constrained due to various impediments. Given the few benefits of remaining in Ghana as refugees, it is a conundrum for the UN refugee agency to understand why a considerable number of Liberian refugees have not returned to their country of origin.

In January 2012, however, UNHCR announced the imminent invocation of the cessation clause for remaining Liberian refugees and has started urging refugees to return to Liberia. Drawing from previous fieldwork and from recent interviews with residual Liberians, the paper explores refugees' decisions over whether to return or stay in Ghana under the tense repatriation pressure. It also draws implications to enable a better understanding of the intractable nature of prolonged refugee situations and highlights the potential future risks for those who may continue to remain in Ghana.

## **Protracted refugee situations**

One of the most complex and daunting humanitarian problems facing the international community today is the increasing scale and frequency of so-called 'protracted refugees situations' – meaning refugees have spent more than five years in exile without any immediate prospect of a solution (Crisp 2003:1). Currently, over two-thirds of refugees in the world are trapped in prolonged exile in the poor developing regions where host states and communities have scarce resources. Further, the average duration of exile is now approaching twenty years, nearly doubled over the past decade (Milner & Loescher 2011:3).

The Liberian refugee population in Ghana is certainly one of these protracted refugee cases for which UNHCR struggles to find a solution to end their exile. It has been a conundrum for the UN refugee agency to understand why a considerable number of Liberian refugees have not returned to their country of origin despite the restored peace in Liberia and the unfavourable living conditions in Ghana. The Liberian civil war which was the root cause of displacement for many Liberians ended with the final ceasefire agreement in 2003.

Levels of humanitarian aid for these refugees have been continually reduced over the last several years and have been almost entirely cut off in the last year or two. Refugees' economic activities in the country have been constrained due to various impediments. The general relationship with the local host community has deteriorated as their exile extended. Despite the few benefits of remaining as refugees, as of 2011, there were still about 11,000 Liberian refugees in Ghana (UNHCR 2011).

This year, the residual Liberian refugees are faced with a critical situational change. In January 2012, the UN refugee agency announced the imminent application of the cessation clause for the remaining Liberian refugees (UNHCR 2012). According to available information sources, remaining Liberian refugees are being urged to repatriate before the invocation of the cessation clause on 30 June 2012.

In order to receive UNHCR's repatriation logistical support and repatriation grant, refugees had to register their repatriation decision with UNHCR by the end of March 2012.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the Ghana Refugee Board, the governmental body responsible for refugee issues in the country, indicated the subsequent closure of the Buduburam settlement where the majority of the 11,000 Liberian refugees reside in Ghana.

Under this intense repatriation pressure coupled with the invocation of the cessation clause, do all remaining refugees choose to return to Liberia, finally bringing an end to this long-term exile? If not, what are the reasons preventing them from repatriation? What implications can be drawn from their decisions to better understand the challenges of prolonged refugee situations? What will be their future if they choose to stay in Ghana? This paper will explore these questions by means of in-depth case studies of Liberian refugees in Ghana.

The data supporting the paper are drawn from my earlier fieldwork and from recent telephone interviews with residual Liberian refugees. Between 2008 and 2009, I conducted fieldwork in Ghana and collected a substantial amount of data on their decisions whether to return or to stay in exile. Given the recent contextual changes, in order to update the data, this year I have conducted a series of telephone interviews with refugees in Ghana. A more detailed explanation of the research methods and data will be provided in the following section.

According to my latest research, in brief, their decisions are divided. Whereas some refugees are finally repatriating to Liberia after their protracted exile, a considerable number of them intend to remain in exile and some have not yet made a decision as of March 2012.

This paper consists of the following sections. After this introductory section, I shall give details of the gathered data and research methodologies for the paper. Next, I shall provide contextual information about Liberian refugees in Ghana and sketch out how the environments surrounding Liberian refugees in Ghana have deteriorated over the decades of their exile.

Then, in the subsequent three sections, drawing from case studies of sample respondents, I shall present reasons why some refugee households opt to remain in exile whilst others are returning or considering repatriation. After that, I shall draw implications from these case analyses and also emphasise some future risks for the residual Liberians in Ghana. I shall conclude by highlighting the limitation of repatriation-centred approaches to protracted refugee cases and argue the necessity for an innovative and coordinated global response to prolonged displacement.

## **Data and methodology**

The data for this paper are mainly drawn from two sets of research conducted at different times: 1) one-year fieldwork between 2008 and 2009 in Ghana and 2) telephone interviews between January and March 2012 with remaining Liberian households there. For the sake of their privacy, all interviewees are anonymised in this paper.

The first set of data is based upon my previous fieldwork in the Buduburam refugee settlement between August 2008 and July 2009. The central focus of the field research was to

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<sup>1</sup> At the end of March, UNHCR Ghana has extended the deadline of registration until 30 April 2012.

gather data on the livelihood strategies employed by different wealth categories of refugees living in the settlement. However, because this field research was begun during the large-scale repatriation, I expanded the scope of the research to incorporate refugees' search for durable solutions and I observed at close quarters how Liberian refugees decided whether to repatriate or to remain in Ghana.

In selecting samples, first, I began by discussing with refugees the economic structure within the settlement. This initial step helped me to realise that access to financial remittances was a main factor in stratifying degrees of economic status in this refugee population. Next, with support from key refugee informants, I set up four different economic groups and chose representative refugees who met the criteria of each category. Semi-structured and unstructured interviewing was my principal research method.

During the fieldwork period in Ghana, I conducted a total of some 300 interviews with about 140 representative households from these four categories. In addition, I followed repatriates from Ghana to Liberia between April and May 2009 to conduct interviews with them in order to gather data on their initial integration in the country of origin.

The second set of data sources is a series of telephone interviews with remaining Liberians in Ghana this year. Even after my departure from Ghana, I maintained communication with about a half of the refugee respondents who had participated in my research; I used email, skype and telephone for these contacts. Since the invocation of the cessation clause was announced in early 2012, our communications have become more frequent and dense.

Although I had already collected a substantial amount of data about their decisions to return or not between 2008 and 2009, due to the recent situation changes, I wanted to get their latest views on repatriation. Because of budget constraints, I was unable to make another field visit to the settlement so instead I conducted telephone interviews with them. Between January and March 2012, from about 140 households who had participated in the previous research, I conducted some 60 interviews with 27 refugee households.

I must admit some limitations in the data gathered in 2012. Primarily, the sample size was smaller than that of the previous field research. Also, since the interviews were conducted by telephone, it was obviously more difficult to discern the subtlety of refugees' responses to my inquiries compared with face-to-face interviews. But these limitations were mitigated by the following efforts which I made.

First, I tried as much as possible to contact refugees with different economic statuses. In addition, in order to cover a wider range of refugee cases, I endeavoured to include diverse groups of refugees, notably those from different ethnicities and genders. Second, all of those with whom I conducted telephone interviews were particular refugees who had actively participated in my previous study.

As I had already interviewed them several times, I had very detailed background information about each respondent and about their previous decision to remain in Ghana. Before carrying out my telephone interviews, I thoroughly reviewed the previous interview notes with them. These efforts contributed considerably to enhancing the representativeness of the sample households and the reliability of the collected data.

The caveat about the data collection conducted in 2012 is that I was unable to interview key refugee policy-makers in Ghana such as UNHCR staff members and officials of the Ghanaian government. But the primary objective of this paper is to understand refugees' decisions about whether to go back to Liberia or not in the light of the information available to them.

To obtain a perspective of non-refugee stakeholders, however, I interviewed two Ghanaian former employees of UNHCR Implementing Partners who were currently working for local NGOs in the Buduburam settlement. I had frequently interviewed these two Ghanaian workers during the previous field research in Ghana and continued to maintain contact with them after my departure.

## **Liberian refugees in Ghana**

This section provides background information about Liberian refugees in Ghana and also sketches out how the environments surrounding these refugees have become increasingly difficult as the length of their sojourn has increased.

The civil war that led Liberians to flee to other West African states began in 1989 but the root causes of this conflict were deeply embedded in the formation of Liberia as a country. In 1821, Liberia was founded by interests in the US as a means of resettling liberated American slaves, who were subsequently called Americo-Liberians. These settlers marginalised the indigenous people and ruled the nation as quasi-imperial masters until the late twentieth century (Ellis 2007: 43).

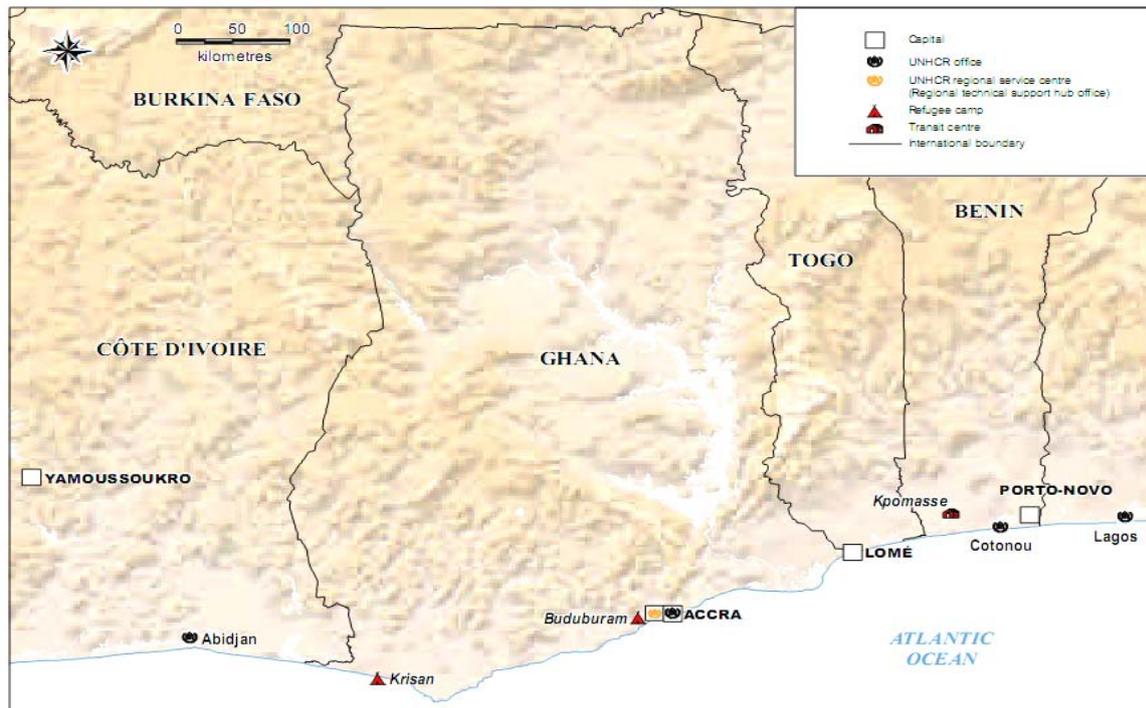
In 1980, Samuel Doe, an indigenous military officer, overthrew the Americo-Liberian regime by a military coup. However, Charles Taylor, a former minister with Americo-Liberian origin who had fled from Liberia to the US, established an anti-Doe military movement during his exile. In December 1989, Taylor's army advanced into Liberia from Ivory Coast to oust Doe from power (*ibid.*: 72). Taylor's military incursion marked the opening of the fourteen-year Liberian war that generated approximately 750,000 refugees to neighbouring countries.

In response to the influxes of displaced Liberians in the country, the Ghanaian government founded the Buduburam refugee settlement in 1990. The settlement lies in a semi-urban area, approximately a one-hour drive from Accra, the capital (see the map below). The area of the Buduburam settlement is approximately 140 acres, although the boundary of the settlement has never been defined clearly. Over time, due to the continuous influxes of refugees from Liberia, refugees have spread beyond this offered settlement site and the Liberian refugee population co-exists with local villagers in these extended areas.

The Liberian war ended in 2003 with the final ceasefire agreement between the warring parties and Taylor's step down from power (Levitt 2005: 226). With the globally shared view of Liberia's recovered stability after 2003, the UN refugee agency centralised its focus on the repatriation of residual refugees to Liberia.

Between 2004 and 2007, UNHCR organised a large-scale repatriation promotion programme for remaining Liberians in the sub-region and encouraged their return to their country of origin. However, because many Liberian refugees had not yet become prepared to return to the precarious political and economic situation in Liberia (also see Dick 2002a: 29; Agblorti

2011: 5), the number of repatriates from Ghana reached only 7,000 during this three-year repatriation programme (UNHCR 2009).



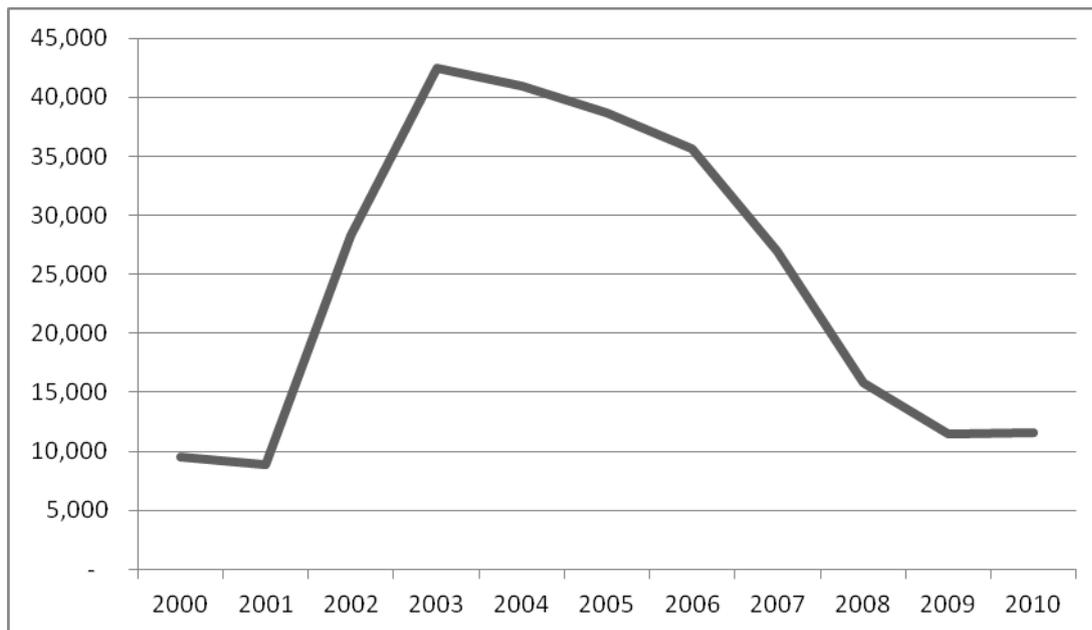
(The map is obtained through <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendocPDFViewer.html?docid=41ab28c70&query=ghana%20global%20appeal>)

Once again, between 2008 and 2009, UNHCR launched another one-year repatriation programme for residual refugees. Due to the persistent repatriation pressure from both national and international refugee regimes, at the beginning of 2011, the total number of registered Liberian refugees in Ghana was reduced to about 11,000 (see Table 1).

As refugee situations become prolonged, levels of international relief are normally significantly reduced or entirely cut off (Jacobsen 2005:2). According to Loescher, in the late 1990s the amount of funding from donor states for prolonged refugees in Africa had started declining and refugees in West Africa, including Liberian refugees, were the principal victims of this funding shortage (2001: 321-322). With a sharply reduced volume of assistance, as Hardgrove notes (2009: 486), after the early 2000s, many refugees in the settlement have had to fend for themselves.

Because of the minimal budget available for them, Liberian refugees in the Buduburam settlement have to pay fees for fundamental services and items such as water, electricity and even using a public latrine. At the point of the fieldwork between 2008 and 2009, as far as I researched, the only free service in the Buduburam settlement was the provision of a food ration by UNHCR and the World Food Programme for targeted vulnerable groups of refugees such as those who were chronically ill or were HIV positive.

**Table 1: The number of Liberian refugees in Ghana after 2000**



*Reducing humanitarian aid and restricted livelihoods*

This programme was, however, in any case terminated in August 2009 immediately after my departure from Ghana. The UN refugee agency used to provide subsidised services for medical treatment and primary education of refugees but all of these services were also halted in the summer of 2009.

With humanitarian aid for Liberian refugees virtually cut off, the livelihoods of refugees in Ghana continue to be constrained by various obstacles. Similar to other refugee settings in developing countries (for example, see Werker 2007; Grabska 2005; Kibreab 2003), the Ghanaian government has set up various bureaucratic impediments to refugees' economic activities in the country.

For instance, refugees in Ghana have been required to obtain work permits from the host government for formal employment but this is a cumbersome process which takes several months, discouraging local employers from hiring refugees. The Ghanaian government does not recognize professional qualifications obtained in Liberia, such as for doctors, nurses and teachers (also see Dick 2002a: 18; Porter *et al.* 2008: 238).

Therefore, these professionals have to retake their training again in Ghana in order to receive an official certificate from the Ghanaian authority, but this is not affordable for the majority of refugees. As a result of these restrictions, refugees have been virtually excluded from gainful formal employment in the country.

*Deteriorating relationship with local communities*

In the very early phase of refugee inflows, the host community's generosity to displaced Liberians played a key role in securing refugees' survival during the emergency phase (Johnson 1995: 115). As the refugee situation became protracted and the amount of

international aid decreased, however, host fatigue began to show (Dick 2002a: 12). In recent years, the general relationship between Liberians and local people has cooled down considerably or even deteriorated (Porter *et al.* 2008: 243).

Many Ghanaians have recently started seeing Liberians as their competitors (Agblorti 2011: 7). In neighbouring local markets around the Buduburam settlement, Liberian refugees are not allowed to trade without paying so-called entry-fees to Ghanaian market leaders. Even if refugees manage to pay these entrance fees, a number of refugees claimed that they face a discriminatory attitude from locals; for example, Ghanaians do not buy items from refugees after they have found that they are Liberians even though they are selling the same items as local traders (also see Hardgrove 2009: 486).

There is a general perception among Ghanaians that Liberian refugees are better-off than local people in the neighbouring areas (Porter *et al.* 2008: 245). This perception has also spurred reluctance among the locals to purchase from Liberian traders.

### *No prospect of durable solutions*

As noted above, despite the persistent promotion of repatriation by the UN refugee agency, roughly 11,000 Liberian refugees remained in Ghana and had been left without any prospect of concrete solutions to their entrenched exile.

Of the three durable solutions, third-country resettlement has been undoubtedly the most popular option among the remaining Liberian refugees in Ghana. In reality, however, the possibility of attaining this durable solution was extremely slight for the majority of residual refugees. At the time of the fieldwork in 2009, resettlement was available only for a handful of those whose spouse, parents or children had migrated to the West and who had submitted applications for family reunion before 2006.

The other solution, local integration, has never gained support either from the host government or from Liberian refugees. A UNHCR internal document on the local integration of Liberians in Ghana explicitly states: ‘the main challenges in Ghana are the absence hitherto of strong or indeed any government support for local integration as a solution’ (UNHCR 2007: 10). The recent report by Agborti also adds to the evidence of the host government’s unwillingness to accommodate the remaining refugees in the country.

This study notes that the Ghanaian government sees that local integration is likely to impose an increased burden on the host government. In addition, the Ghanaian administration thinks that any attempt by the government to integrate refugees will generate strong resentment among the local population, especially if such a plan is to involve the commitment of resources from the host country (Agborti 2011: 7). Because of these concerns, the Government of Ghana has remained very cautious about discussing the option of integrating Liberian refugees in the country.

Local integration has been also unpopular with the majority of Liberian refugees in Ghana. After the unsatisfactory result of the repatriation programme between 2004 and 2007, UNHCR intended to promote local integration for the residual Liberian refugees in Ghana (Geraldine 2008: 6). Nevertheless, these refugees adamantly refused local integration and started protesting against UNHCR’s proposal in early 2008.

Residual refugees in the Buduburam settlement have been concerned about limited economic opportunities and the scarce accommodation resources of the host nation. Also, during my previous study, a considerable number of them had been worried about the loss of future resettlement chances, which they believe to be a sole option to move out of their dire predicament, if they were to accept local integration. I shall come back to the issue of local integration in Ghana in a later section of this paper.

### **Reasons for staying**

As explained above, the announcement of the invocation of the cessation clause was first released by UNHCR in January 2012. Since then, the UN refugee agency has continuously published further announcements mainly highlighting the necessity of registering with UNHCR by the end of March 2012 in order to receive repatriation support. I could access most of these announcements as some refugees emailed me their scanned copies. These proclamations clearly urged refugees to take the repatriation option. One of the banners, for instance, read: 'Let's Return Home!' and stressed: 'Register Now Before It's Too Late!'

The interviews which I held with Liberian refugees between January and March 2012 took place under this tense repatriation pressure. Table 2 presents the updated profile, except for the economic status, of the 27 respondent households with whom I held interviews this year and their decisions whether to return or to remain in Ghana as of March 2012.

I had already interviewed these respondents during my previous fieldwork between 2008 and 2009 and, at that point, all of them chose to stay in Ghana. In 2012, while some of them were making different decisions from those they had made in 2009, sixteen of the 27 respondents still intended to continue their exile in Ghana. The rest of this section explores the reasons why these refugee households are still unwilling to repatriate to Liberia.

### **Feeling of insecurity upon return**

The perception of (in)security after repatriation is highly related to personal experiences during the conflict in the country of origin. The formal signing of a peace treaty does not necessarily mean that the home country has become a safe and comfortable place to return to for all displaced people.

For example, Hardgrove's study on the Buduburam settlement (2009: 497) gives a graphic account of refugee women's fear of being 'hunted' by warlords and ex-soldiers upon their return to Liberia. As her study indicates, since the members of former rebel groups and combatants continue to live in Liberia, such a fear is quite plausible for victims of severe violence during the civil war.

**Table 2: General profile of the respondent households**

| HH # | Assumed name | Male or female head | Ethnicity              | Number of HH members | Economic status (2009) | Years in exile | Returning = R<br>Staying = S<br>Undecided = U |
|------|--------------|---------------------|------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|----------------|---|
| 1    | David        | Male                | Kpelle                 | 5                    | Very poor              | 22             | S   |
| 2    | Emily        | Female              | Grebo                  | 5                    | Very poor              | 22             | S   |
| 3    | Olivia       | Female              | Krahn                  | 5                    | Very poor              | 16             | S   |
| 4    | Tracy        | Female              | Kpelle                 | 4                    | Very poor              | 13             | U   |
| 5    | Denis        | Male                | Sappo                  | 1                    | Very poor              | 22             | S   |
| 6    | Angela       | Female              | Kru                    | 4                    | Very poor              | 16             | S   |
| 7    | Stephanie    | Female              | Vai                    | 2                    | Very poor              | 16             | S   |
| 8    | Emerson      | Male                | Krahn                  | 1                    | Poor                   | 22             | S   |
| 9    | Edith        | Female              | Krahn/Kru              | 3                    | Poor                   | 22             | U   |
| 10   | Alfred       | Male                | -                      | 1                    | Poor                   | 16             | U   |
| 11   | Matilda      | Female              | Vai                    | 3                    | Poor                   | 22             | S   |
| 12   | Nathalie     | Female              | Krahn                  | 2                    | Poor                   | 22             | S   |
| 13   | Christiana   | Female              | Kpelle                 | 3                    | Poor                   | 19             | R   |
| 14   | Kevin        | Male                | Lorma                  | 12                   | Poor                   | 22             | S   |
| 15   | Richard      | Male                | Sappo                  | 1                    | Poor                   | 16             | S   |
| 16   | Oritha       | Female              | Sappo                  | 3                    | Poor                   | 17             | S   |
| 17   | Mike         | Male                | Sappo                  | 12                   | Middle                 | 22             | S   |
| 18   | Marcus       | Male                | Kru                    | 1                    | Middle                 | 22             | R   |
| 19   | Joana        | Female              | Vai                    | 3                    | Middle                 | 11             | S   |
| 20   | Patricia     | Female              | Krahn                  | 2                    | Middle                 | 22             | S   |
| 21   | Victoria     | Female              | Krahn                  | 5                    | Middle                 | 19             | U   |
| 22   | Zack         | Male                | Sappo                  | 1                    | Middle                 | 22             | S   |
| 23   | Kenneth      | Male                | Mano/Grebo             | 5                    | Middle                 | 20             | R   |
| 24   | Susanne      | Female              | Americo Liberian/Lorma | 1                    | Better-off             | 19             | R   |
| 25   | Jones        | Male                | Americo Liberian/Sappo | 6                    | Better-off             | 12             | R   |
| 26   | Thomas       | Male                | Kru                    | 1                    | Better-off             | 16             | R   |
| 27   | John         | Male                | Americo Liberian/Lorma | 5                    | Better-off             | 16             | R   |

According to my research, among the residual refugees in Buduburam, especially those who had been involved in Samuel Doe's administration, many were particularly concerned about the risk of persecution in Liberia. This concern was strengthened by the inauguration of President Johnson Sirleaf in 2005 since she had been persecuted by Doe and she thus had initially supported Charles Taylor who had launched the rebellion against Doe's regime.

For example, Nathalie is a 56-year-old widow who had lost most of her immediate family members in the initial stage of the Liberian war and had managed to flee from Liberia to Ghana in 1990. Because her husband was a superintendent of the county under Doe's administration, her family had been deliberately targeted by the rebel groups. Her fear of being persecuted, coupled with the remaining trauma, prevents her from wanting repatriation

even after two decades of exile. When I asked her whether she would return or not in February 2012, she gave me the same reply that she had given three years earlier:

You know what happened to my family ... my husband was very close to Doe during his regime. This is why we were targeted by rebels. We were tortured, raped ... these rebels have not been arrested. The Liberian war is not over! ... My face and name are well known to them [former rebel groups]. If I go back, they will hunt me.

Among the 27 respondents, in addition to Nathalie, there were four other households who had similar traumatic experiences as a consequence of their family members' deep involvement in the Doe regime. For these refugees who experienced gross human rights violations, Liberia is still a place of intolerable memory. They are still determined not to go back there regardless of the claimed general stability in the post-conflict Liberia.

### *Lack of shelter and housing in Liberia*

Shelter in the country of origin is a key variable in the returning decisions of displaced people, as ample evidence suggests (Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit 2006; Walsh *et al.* 1999). During my previous fieldwork between 2008 and 2009, when I inquired into the reasons for their reluctance to go back to Liberia, one of the common replies from refugees was: 'I have no house and I don't know where to go in Liberia'.

Still, in 2012, among those who are unwilling to return to Liberia, lack of access to accommodation is raised as a major obstacle to their repatriation. After fourteen years of a destructive civil war, for many displaced Liberians, their previous homesteads no longer exist. Because no housing support is provided for returnees either by the Liberian government or by refugee-supporting agencies, all repatriates have to find their shelter by themselves. With respect to access to housing, there is a sharp contrast between refugees who are repatriating and those who opt to remain in Ghana. All seven of the households which have decided to repatriate this year have secured free shelter in Liberia through their familial or clan connections.

If returnees cannot secure free accommodation through their personal contacts, they have to be prepared to pay rent. According to the UNHCR announcement, as part of the repatriation package, 300 USD will be given to a repatriate above eighteen years of age and 200 USD for a returnee below that age upon their repatriation. There is, however, a general consensus among all refugees regardless of returning or staying that 300 USD would be insufficient to cover all of the transition costs, especially rents, incurred by repatriation.

At the point of my fieldwork in Liberia in 2009, the monthly rent in Monrovia, even for a tiny room for a single person with a communal kitchen and toilet, was about 20 USD per month, and advance payment for at least six months was a common practice. Renting a house in the capital could cost at least 100 USD a month. This means that in many cases, a repatriate without a free place to stay would have to use most of the repatriation stipend provided by UNHCR just for rent, leaving only a very small amount to cover other transition costs.

### *Lack of confidence to set up new livelihoods*

Whether refugees can ensure economic security upon return or not was one of the principal concerns shared by Liberian refugees in the previous field research, and it still is in 2012. All of the sixteen respondents who were reluctant to repatriate raised the lack of confidence about obtaining any gainful employment in Liberia.

As Table 2 demonstrates, households in the poorer economic categories have tended to remain in Ghana. Importantly, there is a correlation between their poor socio-economic status, current livelihood strategies and concerns about establishing a new economic basis upon return. These impoverished refugees normally have very few marketable and specialised livelihood skills. In Ghana, they have been surviving by combining multiple income-generating means, such as selling water and fruits, hair-braiding and doing housekeeping jobs for other refugees.

Also, most of the indigent refugees have been heavily reliant on charity and mutual assistance from other settlement-based refugees. Since their income sources are built upon their Buduburam connections, the transferability of these sources to Liberia is significantly restricted (Omata 2011a). In a recent interview, Stephanie, a single mother with a five-year-old daughter, explained to me her concerns about building her livelihood strategies in Liberia:

I am making a little money by selling water inside the camp. I also wash others' clothing for some money. I sometimes get food from my neighbours. This is how my daughter and I have been managing in Ghana. I know I cannot live in the same way in Liberia.

Their concerns about establishing an economic base in Liberia are well-grounded. They have seen a certain number of Liberian refugees who repatriated to Liberia but came back to the Buduburam settlement because of the harsh challenges in their economic integration (*ibid.*). They know that these 're-returnees' to Ghana had more or less had similar or even better economic status when they were living in the settlement.

In addition, this fact spotlights the meagre capacity of the Liberian government to provide adequate support to assist the subsistence of repatriates (also see Fagen 2011). Naturally, remaining refugees come to think that the possibility of economic survival upon return is very slim for them too.

### *Lack of support networks in Liberia*

'I don't have anyone to help me in Liberia'; the lack of personal connections in Liberia has been one of the most frequently raised reasons for reluctance to repatriate among those who have chosen to stay in Ghana. In particular, refugees emphasized the absence of immediate family members in Liberia as a major impediment to their repatriation (also see Hovil 2010: 15).

According to them, relying on non-family members in the country of origin would not be feasible given their limited resources and would also be psychologically painful. In a recent interview which I held in late January with David, who plans to remain in Ghana, he told me:

I don't want to continue relying on my friends. It is embarrassing to beg for support again even in my own country. Also, I know they are struggling to survive there. My family is a total of five people. If we go back and stay with them, it will be another burden on them ...

The existence of familial support is closely linked to issues of securing shelter and livelihoods upon return. The following comment made by Kenneth, a breadwinner of one of households which have decided to go back this year, highlights this point:

In Liberia, we will first go to my sister's place. She stayed in Liberia throughout the war and has a house. She and her husband are running a church there ... They told me we can stay at their place until our life is settled. Perhaps, they can help me find a job there.

In the process of migration, networks serve as a risk reduction tool for migrants and it is a common strategy for them to create a set of people on whom they can count in the destination area (Massey *et al.* 2008: 43; Van Hear 1998: 51). Without access to reliable networks that can provide the basic requirements for living, repatriation will incur significant transition costs. Many refugees who lost familial connections think that the UNHCR stipend would be insufficient to cover all of these expenditures and to enable building meaningful life.

### *Non-registered refugees*

This is something of a logistical obstacle but is certainly not negligible. In addition to approximately 11,000 registered Liberian refugees as of 2011, there are said to be more than a few thousand non-registered Liberians in Ghana. These Liberians have not been recognised by UNHCR and its Ghanaian refugee counterparts and have been excluded from any forms of refugee assistance in Ghana, including repatriation support. Most of them are forced migrants who had fled from Liberia to escape violence during the Liberian civil war.

For various reasons, nonetheless, they missed the opportunity to register themselves with UNHCR at its registration exercise in 2003 and were not given a UNHCR ID card (for details, see Omata 2011b). They have not been able to benefit from UNHCR's repatriation programme including logistical support and the financial stipend.

Of the 27 interviewees listed in Table 2, five respondents are non-registered refugees. In addition to them, during my fieldwork between 2008 and 2009, I came across tens of non-registered Liberians in the settlement. Also, I discovered that these refugees without UNHCR ID cards tended to be found more in the poorer economic categories. Even if they decide to return, it is not realistic for them to pay the transportation cost from Ghana to Liberia, which is at least USD 35 per person.

### **What has changed since 2009?**

According to the 2012 interviews with the 27 respondents, seven of them have changed their minds from 2009 and are repatriating this time. As illustrated by Table 2, noticeably, these returning households are concentrated in the wealthiest economic group. Alternatively, four

respondents were still undecided about whether to return or to remain in Ghana as of March 2012. This section presents the reasons for their repatriation and their hesitation.

### *Putting aside the resettlement dream*

Liberian refugees in Ghana have been well-known for their inextinguishable desire for third-country resettlement (see Dick 2002b: 48; Johnson 2011: 117). At the time of my previous fieldwork, a considerable number of refugees continued to stay in Ghana mainly in order to pursue this durable solution. According to my interviews with some of them in 2012, however, they have put this objective aside and are repatriating this time.

Jones is one of these refugees. This 40-year-old Liberian is from an eminent family background which has produced several statesmen and influential business people in pre-war Liberia. A number of Jones's relatives, including his siblings, had migrated to the US and Jones's household had been largely dependent upon remittances from them during their exile. During the previous repatriation programme between 2008 and 2009, he decided to extend his stay in Ghana in order to pursue resettlement to the West.

Jones's search for resettlement, nevertheless, had not materialised three years later. During an interview with him in February 2012, Jones told me that he was too weary of just waiting for this elusive dream and expressed his will to repatriate. Because some of his siblings had remained in Liberia throughout the civil war, Jones had quickly secured a place to live upon his return.

He used his savings accumulated from previous remittances for his family's transportation without waiting for the UNHCR repatriation programme to begin. With additional remittance support from his relatives, at the beginning of March 2012, Jones's family left Ghana spontaneously to begin their new life in Liberia.

### *Diminishing economic opportunities in Ghana*

According to Crisp (2000: 172), repatriation can be induced by a general deterioration of living conditions in countries of asylum, resulting from reductions in the level of international assistance and declining economic opportunities. As described above, the general environment surrounding refugees in Ghana has been increasingly inhospitable due to the termination of humanitarian aid, worsening relationships with locals and continuous restrictions on refugee livelihoods.

Some of returning refugees believed that remaining in Ghana would make them worse off and therefore they have chosen repatriation. For example, John is a refugee owner of an internet café in the settlement. He set up this popular business with 2,500 USD in remittances from his multiple friends and relatives in the US and Canada. At the time of my previous interviews with him in 2009, his internet café was one of the most lucrative businesses in the settlement and is still so. However, he gave me the following explanation for his decision to repatriate this year:

I have been concerned that my business would slow down in the near future. As you know, the population of the camp has been decreasing in recent years. This

year, I am sure that again many more refugees will leave. With a reducing number of customers, it will be much harder to continue running my business. It is better not to wait until the last minute.

My previous study in 2009 provided evidence that the degree of economic resilience in the Buduburam refugee population had significantly decreased primarily due to the departure of remittance recipients during the repatriation promotion between 2008 and 2009. Among all 27 respondents in 2012, however, there is a firm consensus that refugees' livelihoods and economic conditions have been further undermined since my departure in 2009. I shall come back to this point later.

#### *Limited information about the future in Ghana*

As Table 2 shows, four respondents were hesitant about whether to stay in Ghana or to go back to Liberia, mainly because of the dearth of information about their future prospects if they chose to remain in Ghana. Victoria, the female head of one of these households, explained why she has not decided whether to return or not:

The current situation is very confusing! Right now, UNHCR says 'register, register, register!' We were told that this would be the last opportunity to use the UNHCR repatriation package. So I started feeling like I should go back to Liberia this year. But I want to know what would happen to us if we stay in Ghana. This is why I have not made up my mind yet ...

How would refugees be treated in Ghana after the application of the cessation clause? Whilst this question is central to Liberian refugees, it seems that this important information has not been made available to them. To obtain any information about the scheme of integration in Ghana, I contacted Allen, a Ghanaian employee who used to work for an UNHCR Implementing Partner for several years and is currently working for a local NGO operating inside the Buduburam settlement.

*Me:* Do you know anything about local integration?

*Allen:* Nothing is clear about this. No information at all.

*Me:* Why?

*Allen:* I think the [Ghanaian] government is still reluctant about accepting many refugees in the country. In the meantime, UNHCR is departing from here. I am not sure whether there is any consensus between them about the remaining refugees.

*Me:* What will happen to the camp?

*Allen:* The government and UNHCR announced that after June 30 there will no longer be Buduburam refugee camp. The government is saying they will return this land to local chiefs.

As explained above, because of the reluctance of the host government, local integration in Ghana has been ill-defined. When refugees consider the option of returning to the country of origin, they take into account the viability of the other durable solutions: third country resettlement or remaining in the current asylum country (Kaiser 2010: 51-54). However, the absence of information about integration is making refugees' assessment for their future extremely difficult.

## Comparative case studies

So far in this paper, I have shown a number of factors differentiating refugees' decisions whether to repatriate or not. However, these factors are often interwoven and co-exist in a single household. In order to illustrate this point, in this section, I present three comparative cases: Emily from the non-returning group, Thomas from the returning group and Edith from the undecided group.

Emily is a 39-year-old female household-head with four school-aged children. Her family has been living in the Buduburam settlement since 2003. In pre-war Liberia, she was living in a suburban part of Monrovia, the capital of Liberia. Her parents were selling food in a local market and Emily was working as a housewife for her family. She only completed the first few years of elementary school due to the lack of finance.

In 1990, Emily's village was captured, looted and burnt down by the rebels. Her husband and some of her siblings were killed and Emily and her sisters were raped by rebel soldiers. Emily and her sisters somehow managed to flee from Liberia. As they were dispersed whilst escaping, Emily lost contact with other family members after that. Before she came to Ghana, she spent her exile in Guinea and Ivory Coast. In late 2003, due to the mounting insecurity in Ivory Coast, she fled to Ghana. When she arrived in Buduburam, however, the registration exercise was already finished. Hence, none of her family members have a UNHCR ID card.

At the time of my research in 2009, Emily's household was living hand-to-mouth on only 25-35 Ghana cedes (19-26 USD) per month, made by gathering and selling discarded plastic bags and from charity from other refugees. According to my recent interview in 2012, she stopped collecting dumped plastic bags due to increased competition as many other poorer refugees had started the same livelihood. Last year, she began selling drinking water but made only a tiny profit because of the over-competition in the settlement. As some of her internal helpers repatriated or passed away after 2009, now she is heavily reliant on a few refugees for her family's daily survival.

As of March 2012, Emily was not planning to go back to Liberia for multiple reasons. Her traumatic experiences during the war remain as a deep scar even after twenty years. As she completely lost contact with her family members (in fact, she does not know whether they are still alive or not), she would be unable to rely on family assistance for housing and daily diet in Liberia. With her limited literacy and no special livelihood skills, Emily believes that it would be extremely difficult for her to establish a meaningful livelihood upon return.

Meanwhile, she is increasingly concerned about her future survival in Ghana. With a reducing number of refugees in the settlement, she has been experiencing challenges in making sufficient income from low-profit livelihoods requiring a large number of customers. Also, more importantly, her support networks built on her personal connections with other refugees are shrinking.

As one of her main caregivers is considering repatriation this year, she may lose another crucial helper. Now her worst case scenario is being left alone in Ghana without any other refugees on whom she can depend. Without a UNHCR ID card, however, Emily's family cannot avail themselves of the UNHCR repatriation package. Thus, if they are to change their mind to go back to Liberia, they would have to cover their transportation and other necessary expenses, which is unrealistic with her meagre income.

Similar situations are not uncommon in the impoverished group of refugees in the Buduburam settlement. For these households, return to Liberia and building a new life from scratch is expected to be extremely daunting. In contrast, for some refugees, repatriation entails fewer challenges. The following example describes the situation of Thomas, who is going back to Liberia in 2012.

Thomas is a 41-year-old refugee from a distinguished family with some former ministers in Liberia as his ancestors. His father was a high-ranking government official in the Ministry of Education in Liberia and sent all of his five children, including Thomas, to at least high school. Thomas was planning to move to higher education but the outbreak of Liberian war disturbed his plan. In 1996, because of the persistent instability in Liberia as well as his aspiration to migrate to the West, he decided to leave the country on his own and went straight to Ghana.

According to Van Hear (2004: 28), the quality of life in asylum is largely dependent on the level of endowment that refugees can mobilise. Thomas's life in Ghana had been relatively less stressful and less troublesome because of his access to various assets and networks. With some financial capital which he carried with him, he started a catering business inside the Buduburam settlement and ran it until 2003. From his family, many relatives had moved to the US even before the civil war so he occasionally received remittance support from them.

During his exile, he met his partner who was later resettled in the US. Since her departure from the settlement, his central livelihood has become remittances from her. At the point of my interview with him in 2009, and still in 2012, Thomas had been receiving about 200 USD per month, which is considered more than an adequate amount to live on in Buduburam.

For the last few years, with financial support from his wife, Thomas has been learning advanced computer skills at a vocational training school in Accra. During the last large-scale repatriation programme between 2008 and 2009, he chose to remain in Ghana primarily because he was yet to complete his diploma.

Thomas is not worried about his return because of his family's support in Liberia. Although his parents have already passed away, his siblings who stayed in Liberia throughout the war have been working for UN agencies, the Liberian government and private companies in Monrovia. They also have their own housing. Upon return, he will stay at their place and start searching for a job. With his advanced computer skills and extensive family networks in Liberia, he is confident that he will find gainful employment in a short time. Over the telephone, he sounded quite optimistic and positive about his return to Liberia.

It is perhaps misleading to assume that all of the returning households are as fortunate as the case of Thomas. As shown in Table 2, however, in general, refugees in the wealthier economic brackets are inclined to choose repatriation. Most of these refugees could have gone back to Liberia much earlier but delayed their return for various reasons, including the pursuit of education and of migration to developed countries.

Finally, there were some respondents who were struggling to make up their minds about whether to stay or to repatriate, as the following case illustrates.

Edith, a 46-year-old war widow, went to Ghana in 2001 after spending several years in Sierra Leone and Ivory Coast. She was living with her husband and children in pre-war Liberia. But

after being internally displaced a few times due to rebel attacks, she was forcibly separated from them and Edith alone fled to Sierra Leone in the early 1990s.

In 2001, she returned to Liberia to search for her family but could not locate them and instead found complete strangers occupying their previous living site. Then, the fighting between the warring parties again intensified and she escaped to Ivory Coast. There, she met some of her friends from her childhood and followed them to Ghana where they thought that it would be safer and easier to live than in that francophone neighbour.

At the time of my research in 2009, Edith was receiving irregular remittances of about 50 USD from one of her friends who had resettled in the US from Ghana. Also, she was making an income by selling cookies and plantain chips to other refugees. In my interview with her in February 2012, however, she revealed that the remittances from her friend had terminated in 2010 for unknown reasons. Although she continues selling cookies and chips in the settlement, the sales have declined over the last few years as the refugee population has reduced.

During the repatriation promotion between 2008 and 2009, Edith was determined to stay in Ghana since she thought that returning would entail a number of challenges including securing housing and livelihoods. This year, however, she has been swaying between the options of repatriating to Liberia and remaining in exile. In particular, she was worried about the closure of the Buduburam settlement.

Edith has been living in the rent-free zone of the settlement, and if she is forced to move out of the settlement site, it would be extremely difficult for her to pay rent from her bare subsistence income. She is eager to know what benefits she would get if she were to choose to remain in Ghana, but this information is completely absent.

But return to Liberia seems so challenging to her. She has heard unverified information that some of her extended relatives might be alive in Liberia but even if this is the case she thinks it unrealistic to rely on their assistance since she has not had any communication with them for nearly two decades. Instead, she has been in contact with her church-mates who had already repatriated from Buduburam to Liberia and has been asking whether she can be accommodated in the church if she returns.

Edith told me that she will wait until the very last minute to decide whether to return or to remain in exile because she wants to carefully assess which option would be the more realistic and feasible for her.

In this section, I have presented three cases from different groups based upon their responses to the fast-approaching cessation clause and to repatriation pressure. Importantly, however, these groupings are not fixed. Their decisions are based upon the available information and the situation in which each household is placed as of early 2012. Depending on any further changes in the micro, meso and macro-contexts, they might change their minds later.

## **Implications of the research**

Drawing from the findings presented above, this section highlights some implications to better understand the complex nature of prolonged refugee cases and also aims to offer suggestions about how to approach these intractable problems.

Many researchers have cautioned against homogenising a specific group of refugees (for example, Al-Ali 2002; Turton 2003; Allen & Turton 1996). Three comparative case studies and other examples illustrate that the meaning of ‘repatriation’ is fundamentally different for each household even within the Buduburam-based refugee population.

Like Thomas, some refugees chose exile in order to increase their options, often access to resettlement opportunities. These ‘proactive refugees’ (Van Hear 1998: 44) have normally maintained a foothold in Liberia and repatriation is a second option in case the ideal scenario does not work out. Alternatively, for those who left the country to flee from physical violence and whose family unit was broken before and during displacement, return to Liberia is likely to be a beginning of ‘new suffering’.

The significant diversity among refugees points to the necessity of micro-level analysis and a ‘bottom-up’ approach (Lindley 2011). Without disaggregating the refugee population into an individual or a household, it is hard to capture why some return, others hesitate, and many refuse to go back under the same macro-environment in Ghana. Such approaches may pose some practical challenges for UNHCR and other refugee-assisting agencies on the ground. Given the heterogeneity of refugee circumstances, nonetheless, the adoption of the ‘people-centred approach’ (Zetter 2011:10) is imminent and indispensable if refugee policy-makers are to tackle the issue of unlocking the protracted displacement.

### *Trapped in exile due to a concentration of negative conditions*

The fourth section of this paper listed various impediments to refugees’ repatriation. As the case study of Emily illustrated, these obstacles are not equally dispersed in the Buduburam refugee community but rather are concentrated in the deprived groups of remaining refugees. Many of these refugee households have no shelter, no reliable support networks, no marketable livelihood skills, sometimes no UNHCR ID card, but with traumatic experiences in Liberia. Various impediments have congregated into the complexity that renders these households ‘forcibly immobilised’ (Lubkemann 2008: 455) in Ghana.

A similar situation is documented in a recent study of Iraqi refugees by Chatty and Mansour. According to their research, a noticeable number of Iraqi refugees are being ‘stuck’ in host countries in the Middle East; they do not meet the criteria for third-country resettlement but they cannot return to Iraq for various reasons (Chatty & Mansour 2011: 27-28).

This trapped group includes some of the most vulnerable types of refugee such as less-skilled young people and the elderly left behind by other family members. As Long suggests (2011: 28) and this paper also indicates, there is a complex inter-linkage between persecution, vulnerability, poverty and repatriation in protracted displacement and this nexus deserves much more attention from the refugee policy-makers.

### *Increasing vulnerability in a residual population*

In refugee studies, it is often said that those who are wealthier or more resourceful tend to repatriate or leave earlier from a camp, especially in the face of any insecurity or trouble. Crisp writes: ‘the strongest members of a refugee population are usually the first to repatriate, leaving the weaker members behind’ (2003: 8). The responses of Liberian refugees to the forthcoming cessation clause and the closure of the settlement corroborate this tendency; better-off households are departing from Ghana whereas poorer ones are being left in the settlement.

This, in turn, means a growing proportion of vulnerable groups in a refugee population as the length of the sojourn becomes extended. As examples of Liberian households who are unable or unwilling to return show, most of them have weak subsistence, meagre economic resources and limited personal networks. However, humanitarian aid for them had been already terminated and UNHCR is invoking the cessation of their refugee status. Just when the level of vulnerability in the Buduburam refugee community seems to be reaching its maximum, ironically, the attention of the international refugee regime for this refugee population is ending.

### *Limitations of the existing framework of durable solutions*

As echoed by many scholars (Monsutti 2006 & 2008; Kaiser 2010; Van Hear 2003) and confirmed by further evidence added by this research, the frequency of trapped exile is a symptom that the existing approaches based upon three durable solutions have failed. Currently, third-country resettlement is inaccessible for the majority of refugees in the South, including Liberian refugees. Thus, after the end of conflict in the country of origin, refugees are pressed either to repatriate or to be integrated in a host country (Koser 2002: 138).

However, the diverse and complicated nature of prolonged refugee situations sits very uneasily with the enforced dichotomy of ‘return or stay’ or ‘home or exile’. As the examples presented in this paper illustrate, for certain refugees, return to a country of origin is not a feasible choice. Also, even those who continue to stay in exile are not really intending to take the option of ‘local integration’. Rather, many of them are confined in exile without any alternatives for their future. It is evident that refugee policy-makers and international actors are required to reframe the challenges of long-term displacement and seek for comprehensive approaches.

### **The future in limbo: potential risks for the residual population**

Given the findings from this year’s interviews with Liberian refugees, it is not realistic to assume that all of the remaining 11,000 refugees would choose repatriation even in the face of the forthcoming cessation clause and under repatriation strain from non-refugee stakeholders. In fact, the pace of registration for repatriation seems sluggish.

According to a recent report by the Ghanaian media, as of early March 2012, only 450 out of 11,000 Liberian refugees in Ghana have registered with UNHCR for repatriation to Liberia. On the other hand, this news source also cites a comment from a UNHCR staff member:

'over 2,500 Liberian refugees have already expressed interest in integrating in Ghanaian society' (Ghana News Agency 2012).

For these refugees who opt to stay in exile, however, there have not been any concrete schemes for them as of March 2012, as far as I have been able to ascertain. There will be some serious risks that these residual refugees may confront if they are abandoned in Ghana without any successive plan.

First of all, although I have not collected the detailed data on refugees' subsistence this year, as comments of refugees indicate, the overall socio-economic conditions of the Buduburam refugee community seem to be only weakening. In particular, those who are engaged in petty trading dealing with fellow refugees, which is the majority of the remaining refugees, are seriously distressed by the declining sales and profits caused by the reduced number of refugees.

In addition, the volume of overseas remittances, the financial lifeline for the Buduburam refugee community, will very likely see a drop this year. Similar to the departure of many remittance recipients during the previous repatriation programme between 2008 and 2009, this year, wealthier refugees who have been benefiting from remittance support are leaving Ghana.

This means the loss of spill-over impacts of remittances for those who are running businesses inside the settlement and who have been getting secondary benefits of the received money, which is an important income source for poorer refugees. Alarming, the lack of economic opportunities might force the residual refugees to take up negative survival coping strategies such as commercial sex and crime in the area (Slaughter & Crisp 2009: 9).

Another potential risk is the increasing tension with local Ghanaian villagers. My interviews with host communities between 2008 and 2009 confirmed that local villagers in general admitted the developmental benefits brought by the existence of refugees, such as schools, a water pipeline and a clinic that were set up by UNHCR. But with support terminated, it will be difficult to see any additional and visible benefits of hosting refugees and this feeling may accelerate their host fatigue or even turn it into hostility against refugees.

Moreover, if, as is reported by the local media, the host government closes down the Buduburam settlement and forces all refugees out of the site, most of the refugees will then be homeless. Currently, a considerable number of refugees are living in rent-free zones inside the Buduburam settlement. The rents around the settlement area would be at least 20-30 USD per month and refugees are normally required to pay twelve months rent in advance. As seen from the discussion above, with the scarce economic capacity of the residual refugees, most of them will not be able to afford these financial costs.

During my telephone interviews with refugees, I asked the sixteen households which are planning to stay in Ghana whether they are preparing to find any alternative accommodation in case of the settlement closure. Only one of them had a back-up plan to move to a Liberian refugee friend who had already moved to Accra from Buduburam.

In recent years, as a last resort, the possibility of ECOWAS-based sub-regional integration has been discussed for Liberian refugees who are reluctant to take an option of repatriation (Adepoju *et al.* 2007; Long 2009). The gist of this new approach is based on the 1979

Protocol on Free Movement adopted by ECOWAS, which confers on community citizens the right to enter, reside in and establish economic activities in the territory of any member states. UNHCR has been thinking that this new framework would facilitate the movement of residual Liberians to places in other sub-regional states where they can find more employment opportunities. But we cannot ignore the realities that most of the ECOWAS member countries are among the least-developed nations suffering from stagnant economy and high unemployment.

As repeatedly emphasised throughout this paper, also, most of residual Liberian do not have any marketable livelihood skills and financial capitals to embark on new enterprises. Therefore, ensuring mobility alone might not make any differences in their post-refugee life in Ghana. In any case, it requires further scrutiny whether this sub-regional scheme can constitute a 'solution' for Liberians who continue their exile.

## **Conclusion**

UNHCR has been tackling the prolonged displacement by promoting repatriation as the most optimum solution for refugees. This approach is built upon the flawed concept of perceiving repatriation as a natural home-return subsequent to the termination of violence or war in the homeland (Black & Koser 1999: 7-10). This assumption inevitably leads refugee policy-makers to ask a question: 'Why don't refugees go back to their home even after the end of conflict?'

If repatriation is a mere physical return to the territory of Liberia, all of the remaining Liberians could easily make it provided that UNHCR gives them free transportation from Ghana to Liberia. However, if repatriation is conceived as a process of re-making and restoring their meaningful life and livelihoods with security and dignity in the country of origin (Hovil 2010; Long 2010), this may not be readily achievable for a considerable number of residual refugees in Ghana. Whereas the refugee-assisting regime tends to see repatriation in the former terms and implements repatriation programmes on that basis, most of the Liberian refugees understand it in the latter way.

The persistence of protracted refugee situations is the combined result of the long instability in the country of origin, the policy responses of the country of asylum, and the lack of sufficient engagement in these situations by a range of other actors (Loescher & Milner 2009: 9). Given the extensive range of stakeholders embroiled in the causes and consequences of prolonged displacement, UNHCR alone is unlikely to come up with any lasting and effective remedies to break these complex impasses.

In 2010, UNHCR, in partnership with the World Bank and UNDP, initiated the *Transitional Solutions Initiative* to formulate policies and actions targeted at protracted displacement as well as post-conflict recovery. Although the initiative is yet to be substantiated, recognition of the need for an integrated approach is clearly a movement in the right direction.

Importantly, though often neglected, refugees themselves ought to be more encouraged and facilitated to actively participate in the search for and preparation of solutions (Bradley 2011: 31). The magnitude of prolonged displacement today requires an urgent, innovative and coordinated approach with international solidarity. Otherwise, protracted displacement will become a perpetual crisis.

This paper is based upon collected data until mid-March 2012. Given the extremely precarious and alarming situation in which Liberian refugees are placed, follow-up research, ideally including field studies both in Ghana and Liberia, is urgently needed. Due to the lack of updated data, in this paper, I have not addressed some other groups which are perhaps reluctant to repatriate: for instance, former combatants/child-soldiers; second-generation refugees who were born in Ghana; and those who got married to Ghanaians. Their specific situations may also require special attention too.

I conclude this paper by once again emphasising the increasing proportion of vulnerable households who are trapped in the Buduburam settlement. Their current circumstance is best described as 'unaccepted where they are, unable to return whence they came' (Gordenker 1987: 213). Their deadlocked plight deserves much more attention from refugee-supporting regime.

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