



REPATRIATION AND REINTEGRATION OPERATIONS FOR LIBERIANS

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MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

HIGH COMMISSIONER'S VISIT

In February, High Commissioner Ruud Lubbers conducted a six-day mission to countries of the Mano River Union and Cote d'Ivoire. In Liberia, the High Commissioner held discussions with the Chairman of the National Transitional Government and Ministers on the repatriation of Liberian refugees and West African sub-regional issues. He also met with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, the UN Country Team and members of the diplomatic and donor community. The High Commissioner accompanied a land convoy of 205 Liberian returnees from Sierra Leone. During a field mission to Voinjama in northern Liberia, he opened a school that had been rehabilitated by UNHCR.



REFUGEE REPATRIATION

Between October 2004 and February 2005, more than 7,600 Liberians returned with UNHCR's assistance, while an estimated 100,000 returned spontaneously, mostly from border areas of neighbouring countries. Most people have returned to Lofa County, followed by Grand Cape Mount, Bomi, Montserrado, Bong, Nimba, Grand Geddeh and Maryland. Since January, 351 persons have repatriated from Côte d'Ivoire through the Toe Town axis. Another axis is to

Country of Asylum	Assisted returns
Côte d'Ivoire	351
Ghana	2,066
Guinea	2,157
Libya	17
Nigeria	740
Sierra Leone	2,312
TOTAL	7,643

be opened through Tabou via Cavalla Ferry for persons returning to Maryland. In the Gambia, 113 Liberian refugees have indicated their willingness to return home. Departure formalities are yet to be completed. There are over 700 Liberian refugees in the Gambia who live mostly in the city of Banjul. In Ghana, UNHCR and IOM successfully conducted several airlifts of Liberian refugees from Accra to Monrovia. For those with heavy personal belongings, arrangements for travel by sea were on the MV Cerano (see picture). In Guinea, registration of candidates for facilitated repatriation is ongoing in all camps. They are returning mostly to Bong County and in lesser numbers to Lofa County. Regular repatriation convoys have been continuing from Sierra Leone through Bo Waterside.

IDP RETURNS

Since November 2004, over 58,565 IDPs have been assisted to return with support from UNHCR, IOM and WFP from camps in and

SITUATION OVERVIEW

Attempts to lay genuine foundations for durable post-conflict **democratic governance** in Liberia have started albeit slowly. Accountability and transparency pose serious challenges to the public service which is struggling to return to normal. International financial institutions such as the World Bank and IMF as well as the United States Department of Treasury have seconded personnel to work with Government financial managers to help reverse this trend.

Central **government control** is gradually being restored to areas outside of Monrovia. In recent months, the government has appointed a number of civil administrators and law enforcement officials to

administer the affairs of local government. The UNMIL Civilian Police (CIVPOL) and the Liberia National Police have been working together to re-establish the rule of law. UNMIL has completed the retraining of the first batch of Liberia National Police officers. CIVPOL and the newly trained police units have deployed in all 15 Counties albeit in small numbers. The courts have resumed work again in some of these areas. Border control is also being reclaimed gradually .

Freedom of the press is flourishing. Despite the aggressive posture of the press, which is mainly private-sector based, there are no arbitrary arrests of journalists. There are more than 30 newspapers, about 20 radio and three

television stations with activities mostly concentrated in and around Monrovia.

In December 2004 the UN Security Council renewed the **sanctions on timber and diamond** sectors as well as on weapons and travel by certain former officials of government. The NTGL has termed the continued application of the sanctions *punitive* and has been lobbying for them to be lifted.

As provided for under the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, **elections** are scheduled to take place in October 2005. A task force comprising UNMIL, UNDP and National Electoral Commission is spearheading voter education and sensitization, and campaigns have started to

RETURNEE MONITORING

Persons who are assisted to repatriate by UNHCR are a well identified group—their destinations are known and they are provided with a safety net of non-food items and WFP food upon return. The proportion of spontaneous returns to border areas is significantly high. The challenge is to identify communities where people are returning on their own and to respond to the collective needs of returnees and receiving communities.

UNHCR has established a monitoring mechanism with the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) in the Counties of Montserrado, Margibi, Grand Cape Mount, Lofa, Nimba and Grand Gedeh, which is delivering a more accurate understanding of the communities, including numbers of returnees, IDPs, shelter, water and food needs and disputes within the communities. In Maryland, Grand Kru and River Gee, UNHCR is supporting the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) who established a monitoring mechanism with four NGOs to provide information on the communities and numbers of returnees. The most accurate and up to date information obtained is from ICRC in Lofa and DRC in the south. Both agencies have been working in the respective areas for a few years and never completely departed during the last conflict. Their network for information gathering and post conflict information on populations in the communities at the time of the Peace Accords in October 2003 up to the end of 2004 provides a good understanding of the number and rate of return to Lofa and Maryland.

take form. The new electoral reform bill was enacted in December 2004. It suspends, *inter alia*, portions of the Liberian Constitution as provided for under the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. It also provides for IDPs and returnees to take part in the elections. There are nearly two dozen political parties, 18 of which are signatories to the CPA.

While the **disarmament and demobilization** (DD) process seems to have finally progressed relatively fast and ended well, helping to open up parts of the country that were hitherto inaccessible, and increasing security for humanitarian workers. Conversely, the **reintegration and rehabilitation** (RR) of the demobilized ex-combatants is

not progressing satisfactorily. Constraints emanate in large measure from shortfalls in funding. In his 5th progress report to the Security Council, the Secretary-General said that US\$60 million was needed to rehabilitate and reintegrate ex-combatants.

The absence of a comprehensive framework to control the activities of **roving ex-combatants in the sub-region** potentially threatens regional and international efforts to stabilize West Africa. To address cross border issues, the respective Force Commanders in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire hold regular meetings on security issues. UNHCR has been monitoring the disarmament and demobilization of foreign ex-combatants. Of the more

than 700 who have gone through the DDDR process in Liberia, none has come forward to claim refugee status. UNHCR has put forward recommendations for the formulation of a regional framework to guide the process of their repatriation.

In October 2004 Liberia and Sierra Leone signed an agreement in Monrovia, which is aimed at establishing a sustained regime for the reciprocal **voluntary repatriation of former combatants**. Similar steps will be pursued to deal with nationals of other countries who took part in the war in Liberia. UNHCR has been asked to join a proposed Technical Task Force to determine the operational framework for repatriation of ex-combatants.

MASS INFORMATION

A coordinated mass information campaign was conducted in late 2004 to heighten awareness on conditions in places of return and sensitize communities to receive returnee populations. Information was disseminated in refugee hosting areas in Guinea and Sierra Leone. In Liberia, popular radio programmes were used to mainstream voices of refugees and IDPs into the national dialogue as a means to ensuring their issues and concerns were heard and assisting their successful social reintegration. Live drama performances in camps and communities highlighted issues including peace education and problem-solving and negotiation in reclaiming property upon returning home. Interviews with camp-based Liberian refugees in Guinea highlighted some fears and concerns, including:

- Previous experience of returning home only to get caught up in new rounds of violence;
- Experiences of family and relatives being killed and their property destroyed or seized by fighters;
- Unknown whereabouts of their families;
- Safety could not be guaranteed with those who perpetrated violence in the present government;
- News that factions were not handing over their weapons;
- Resettlement of IDPs who remain in camps around Monrovia would encourage refugees to go home;
- Lack of vital social services, including education, in areas of return.

GENDER PERSPECTIVES IN THE 4RS' CONTEXT

Mainstreaming gender in project identification, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation is a key priority for UNHCR in Liberia. Many of agencies lack the capacity to mainstream gender in service delivery. Gender tends to be treated as a separate issue to be discussed only in gender workshops and not—for example—in water and sanitation project meetings. Women are thus often left out of decision-making processes, including the project cycle management except the implementation stage where their productive and reproductive roles are needed.

For this reason, UNHCR has an agreement with implementing partner, Development Education Network-Liberia (DEN-L) to mainstream gender in the Counties of Bong, Bomi, Grand Gedeh, Lofa, Maryland and Nimba specifically targeting war-affected communities. Whereas it is understood that social empowerment along will not be enough, the process will enable both women and men to advocate for equal rights. Activities include:

- **Gender mainstreaming** for UNHCR and implementing partner staff
- **Assessment workshops** for Community Based Organisations and local NGOs to gather baseline data on gender and leadership awareness
- **Development and leadership** for decision-makers in Community Based Organisations and local NGOs based on Paulo Freire's work on critical consciousness
- **Gender mainstreaming** for education authorities to help identify gender gaps in the school curriculum
- **Participatory learning/Rural Appraisal** for CBOs and LNGOs in each county
- **Gender, development and leadership** for DDCs
- **HIV/AIDS awareness** for representatives of CBOS
- **Adult literacy training** for facilitators to enhance women's capacity to articulate issues that affect them

Repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation, and reconstruction are processes that must be conceptualized and implemented with a gender and human rights perspective. Any post-war society is inevitably undergoing profound changes in its socio-economic and political composition affecting those who never left their places of origin and those who sought refuge in IDP camps or in other countries. The latter group may have endured severe traumatic experiences and violations outside the protections and support found in refugee and IDP camps; the "stayees" often include women who could not flee because of social roles as carers for the young, aged and sick, and those with various forms of disabilities.

From a gender perspective, repatriation and reintegration often also have disintegrative aspects. Newly gained economic freedom and independence, long years of separation and exposure to new social environments and attitudes, new perceptions of the role of the family and its members, and forced migration in search of employment, all contribute to dismantling of existing social institutions and the establishment of new ones. Social integration, in other words, is not simply about "coming home", but about defining new guiding social values and establishing corresponding relationships and institutions based on a combination of factors including kinship, socio-economic interests, and shared experiences and circumstances.

Within Liberian traditional societies, land and labour arrangements are usually negotiated through men; in their absence women may lose access to both. The extent to which the 14 years of war has caused disintegration of families and change in the demographics of family and community level will only become known as communities return. Such an assessment is critical right at the beginning of the 4R process. Even where women maintain control over land, the lack of male labour may result in women having to forfeit the land. There is an increase in the dependency ratio and women's work burden

with the large number of orphaned children and war disabled, in addition to the elderly who have to be cared for by the women.

Traditional gender roles dictate that women are the primary health-care providers for their families, a responsibility made more difficult by lack of services and funds to pay for treatment. The time required to look after the increased numbers of sick household members restricts women's mobility and detracts from the time they could dedicate to productive activities. Evidence from some of the conflict-affected countries illustrates the gender dimension of disability. Disabled men rely on their wives for support, while disabled women are abandoned by their partners or have difficulty in finding support. In view of the above, women can be described in effect as constituting the only available social safety networks for many families at the beginning and during the 4R process.

As people return to their communities from displacement, women tend to play a crucial role in building and nurturing social cohesion and integration at family and community level. Yet they are often excluded from local governance structures that emerge during repatriation, reintegration and reconstruction. Exclusion at this stage will have negative and serious implications for women's capabilities and opportunities to participate in governance in a post-transition Liberia. Some women are able to step out of their socially ascribed roles to respond to the exigencies of crisis situations.

This experience can be described as empowerment. If built upon in the post-conflict context, it can facilitate the breakdown of gender stereotypes, which often impede women's advancement in the economic, political and social spheres. However, programmes and projects often fail to capitalize upon this with a view to strengthening it. In fact, experience now shows that "once peace returns, traditional social structures and gender divisions often return also". For example, the type of training courses provided for women not only during but

after conflict often reflect their domestic functions (sewing, knitting, cooking) and are not closely linked to emerging business and other opportunities in the labour market changed by the conflict. Some of the survival strategies adopted during crisis are, however, not always positive or empowering. Engaging in survival or commercial sex work, and trafficking in persons are common examples. Communities are the blocks of society. Rebuilding communities is based on the underlying principles of inclusiveness and non-discrimination. Equal access to resources, decision making power, opportunities and to information while encouraging and supporting the civic participation of people making up communities will sustain long-term peace and stability in Liberia: and minimize the potential for future outflows.

There are no reliable statistics on the incidence of HIV/AIDS and other diseases associated with conflict, mobility and inadequate food in Liberia. However, current research indicates that gender plays a crucial role in determining a man or woman's risk and vulnerability in the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Socio-cultural norms pertaining to men and women's roles, the unequal power relations between men and women that arise from these norms, compounded with biological and physiological factors, all have an impact on the spread of HIV/AIDS. There are a number of reasons why women are more vulnerable to the risk of sexual infection than men. Biological factors for example, account for estimates of male-female by transmission being twice more likely than female-male. Social and cultural traditions which sustain gender inequalities further compound the problem. In many cultures, women are neither expected to make decisions about or to discuss sexuality, nor are they in a position to request or insist on protective sex including the use of condoms. Financial dependence on men often limits women's ability to negotiate safe sex. It is therefore necessary to integrate addressing AIDS in empowerment activities.

FOCUS ON YOUTH

UNHCR has entered into agreement with a partner to involve in positive social change aimed at preventing replicating oppressive and abusive practices that characterized the conflict in Liberia. During the 14 years of civil war, gross violation of human rights was wide spread and abuse of women and girls included rape, gang rapes, abduction and sexual slavery, forced prostitution, domestic violence and child sexual abuse amid multiple displacements. As communities begin to come together efforts must be made to prevent the cycle of SGBV that was commonplace in the conflict setting. Certain forms of abuse like early and forced marriage, female genital mutilation, and domestic violence existed before the conflict and are likely to continue. Among issues of concern for women and children will be those abducted by combatants are likely to remain in forced marriages, some will face stigmatization and abandonment by their families, and land and property acquisition for women and girls will be a challenge.

Saturday Theatre will use participatory community theatre to disseminate and communicate information on SGBV with a combination of education and entertainment that has been coined “edutainment”. The approach builds upon the culture and traditions of folklore, drama, dances and songs passed from generation to generation. This is a Liberian method of socialization passed on by older people, but in this case the youth will be encouraged to combine this with non-Liberian techniques. The theatre is a process as well as a product and therefore the entire process of developing the performances, having workshops, and conducting participatory research is a learning process for the youth and the community.

The interactive theatre will involve the community in analyzing SGBV, discussing and identifying problems and seeking solutions. The main activities will be performances by the youth community members supported by a facilitator. The audience will participate in

acting and in discussions on the topic of the performance and quality of performance. Through dialogue the level of awareness will be raised and contribute to the mobilization of communities to take action and support the processes of social change. The audience will be involved in the performance through dialogue and it is the interaction between actors and audience that generates identification and solution of community problems.

TARGET GROUP

The primary target group is the male and female youth who have returned from asylum in neighbouring countries or IDP camps, as well as those who never left Totoquelleh . Existing youth groups like sports groups, girls clubs and religious groups will be targeted; other interest groups will be supported to establish themselves to ensure that there is an equal representation of girls and boys and a fair village coverage, and that ex combatants, other women and children associated with the fighting forces are integrated into the project.

The secondary beneficiaries of the project will be the general community members of Gbapolu County especially Totoquelleh Town including the over 2000 refugees and the IDPs who expected to return to Gbarpolu and other youth not participating in the theatre. The youth as primary beneficiaries will in turn act as agents of change and hence implementers of the project who interact with the audience and engage them in dialogue for positive change.

IMPLEMENTATION

UNHCR will implement the project directly with a project facilitator/community development worker who is well experienced in the use of community participatory approaches and human rights. UNHCR Community Services and the facilitator of the project will work in partnership with the youth group as the implementers of the project.

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around Monrovia to their Counties of origin. Large numbers are believed to have returned spontaneously. UNHCR provides travel grant and non-food items, WFP provides food for four months, and IOM coordinates transportation. There are more than 200,000 IDPs still in camps. The Government and humanitarian actors are discussing ways and means to accelerate IDP movement. Crucially, assistance is being taken as close as possible to the places of return of the IDPs.

ELECTIONS

The National Elections Commission (NEC) has released the timetable and guidelines for the conduct of general elections which are scheduled to take place on 11 October 2005. This follows the launch of the countrywide voter education campaign on 31 January. Political parties will begin canvassing for membership on 11 March. The final day for the submission of applications to register as political parties will be 11 April. Voter Registration is scheduled to run from 25 April to 21 May. UNHCR and the Liberian Government are finalizing agreement on documentation to identify and facilitate Liberian refugees who may come after the stipulated deadline and want to exercise their right to vote.

FEBRUARY MEETINGS

- A joint EU/US Government delegation visited Liberia to evaluate the international effort under way to improve conditions to accelerate the repatriation of Liberian refugees and relocation of IDPs to their places of origin. The delegation met with government officials, representatives of UN agencies and NGOs. The USA and the EU are the two leading donors in Liberia.
- World Bank Managing Director, Mr. Shengman Zhang, paid a visit to Liberia in February during which he announced additional assistance towards the country's recovery programme. The World Bank has earmarked \$29 million for post-war reconstruction, particularly capacity building, fighting corruption and infrastructure development (community development and empowerment,

repair of major roads, water and telecommunications).

- UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP and FAO participated in meeting with USAID Assistant Administrator for the Africa Bureau to review the status of DDDR programme in Liberia.
- A UNHCR officials from Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone met in Monrovia on 17-18 February to harmonise repatriation plans. These countries are expected to repatriate 66,000 Liberian refugees in 2005.
- UNHCR officials from Cote d'Ivoire and Liberia held cross border meetings in Tabou and Harper during to assess conditions for facilitated repatriation from Cote d'Ivoire.
- UNHCR participated in an inter-agency multi-Sectoral Protection meeting in Lofa County, the county expecting to receive the highest number of returnees.
- Also in Lofa, 24 representatives of various health-related organisations took part in workshop organised by International Medical Corps to tackle malaria and introduce rapid test kits as well as new treatment protocols.
- The Bong County Health Team has developed a strategic plan to support health programmes in the County involving eight UNHCR implementing and operational partners.
- In Maryland, UNHCR participated in discussions by NGOs in the health sector and County officials covering a wide range of issues, including the ongoing polio eradication campaign.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- Donor Mission to Liberia: 28 Feb-2 Mar
- UNHCR Country Operations Planning Workshop: 3-5 Mar
- Tripartite Commission (Liberia-Guinea-UNHCR): 8/9 March
- Tripartite Commission (Liberia-Ghana-UNHCR): 18 March
- Crossborder meeting (Voinjama-Nzerekore): March

UNHCR Community Empowerment Projects and other Reintegration Activities

County	Declared ready for return	DISPLACEMENT STATISTICS OF REFUGEES (as of February 2004)			BREAKDOWN OF REINTEGRATION PROJECTS						
		Registered refugees	IDP esti- mates	Total refugees + IDPS (percentage of total)	Agriculture	Community services	Education	Health and nutrition	Infrastruc- ture	Water and Sanitation	TOTAL
Bomi	Sep'04	1,341	122,000	123,341 (17%)	68	5	40	17	8	60	198
Bong	Oct'04	17,085	61,000	78,085 (11%)	-	4	24	4	-	1	33
Gbarpolu	Sep'04	2,065	41,000	43,065 (6%)	-	4	6	13	21	58	102
Grand Bassa	Jan'05	2,136	22,000	24,136 (3%)	-	3	6	5	3	10	27
Grand Cape Mount	Sep'04	13,200	45,000	58,200 (8%)	-	15	21	12	4	69	121
Grand Gedeh	Jan'05	28,539	18,000	46,539 (11%)	-	21	24	7	5	70	127
Grand Kru	Feb'05	2,041	4,000	6,041 (1%)	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
Lofa	Jan'05	84,532	90,000	174,532 (24%)	40	-	8	3	-	100	151
Margibi	Sep'04	1,856	7,000	8,856 (1%)	-	4	7	5	1	34	51
Maryland	Jan'05	42,412	5,000	47,412 (7%)	5	42	10	8	1	86	152
Montserrado	Jan'05	17,085	8,000	25,085 (3%)	-	-	5	5	3	12	25
Nimba	Jan'05	31,483	9,000	40,483 (6%)	2	11	42	5	10	34	104
River Cess	Oct'04	1,159	23,000	24,159 (3%)	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
River Gee	Jan'05	1,110	0	1,110 (0%)	-	2	-	-	-	-	2
Sinoe	Feb'05	1,551	9,000	10,551 (1%)	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
Not known		5,777		5,777 (1%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
TOTAL		253,372	464,000	717,373 (100%)	115	112	193	84	56	534	1,094



Maiden convoy from Côte d'Ivoire, 11 January 2005
Photo: F.Fontanini

