



SIX MONTHS AFTER THE OFFICIAL CLOSURE OF THE IDP CAMPS

JRS Assessment of the IDP Return Process in Liberia



The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS)

The Jesuit Refugee Service is an international Catholic organisation, whose mission is to accompany, serve and defend the rights of refugees and forcibly displaced people. JRS works at the national and regional levels with the support of an international office in Rome. JRS programs are found in over 50 countries, providing assistance to refugees in refugee camps, to people displaced within their own country, to asylum seekers in cities and those held in detention. The main fields of work are Education, Advocacy, Emergency Assistance, Health and Nutrition, Income Generating Activities and Social Services. At the end of 2004, more than 450,000 individuals were direct beneficiaries of JRS projects throughout the world.

JRS has been working with internally displaced persons (IDP) in Liberia since 1992. However, the first JRS team was forced to flee the country in 1994 due to an intensification of the conflict. Three years later, JRS returned along with the refugees it had accompanied in exile in Ivory Coast and Guinea, after democratic elections in 1997 established a more peaceful climate. After the signature of the Accra Peace Agreement in August 2003, JRS developed educational projects (school funding, vocational training) in IDP camps located in Montserrado and Bong Counties, home to almost 250,000 IDPs.

In light of the closure of the IDP camps, JRS turned the focus of its projects to areas of return in the summer of 2005. JRS currently runs educational projects, including school reconstruction, school agriculture, school feeding, teacher training, vocational training and psycho-social accompaniment, in Lofa, Nimba, and Bomi Counties, as well as in the West-Point District of Monrovia.

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

IDP camps in Liberia were officially closed in April 2006. This event, celebrated by the Liberian Government as well as by UNMIL, marked the end of the return process for the almost 320,000 IDPs who left for their communities of origin.

IDPs Remaining on the Sites of the Camps

When visiting the camp sites, however, one may find people who still remain. Among them, there are former IDPs who want to integrate into the surrounding local communities. For them, there exists the risk of conflict with certain landowners looking to recuperate their land. Even more pressing though is the question of humanitarian assistance, since most of the NGOs left after the camps officially closed. As in the rest of the country, basic infrastructure (wells, latrines, clinics and schools) were destroyed during the years of conflict. Housing, which in most cases resembles only makeshift shelters, is in a deplorable state. The group most affected by this situation is the vulnerable (single mothers, elders and handicapped people). Often they were not able to return to their places of origin due to the lack of family members to care for them or out of necessity to stay near Monrovia's hospitals.

Other people, however, remained at the former camp sites through force of circumstance. Despite wanting to go back home, these people failed to sign up for the return process and thus were not able to benefit from the assistance that the other IDPs received. Aware of this problem, UNHCR conducted an evaluation last May, at the end of which it was decided in concert with the Liberian authorities to organize transportation for 5,480 qualifying IDPs to return home. Once in their communities of origin, the returnees will receive the food and materials (pots, blankets, soap...) to which the other IDPs were entitled.

Mid-December, UNHCR announced it has assisted 5,245 individuals to return home. Among them, 313 vulnerable people, identified by the UN agency, will need special assistance in return communities.

Returnees

On the other hand, the great majority of people who returned to Lofa and Bomi, the two Counties which have welcome most of the returnees in Liberia, express their happiness to be back home. They especially enjoy their new freedom of movement. When they were in camps, they suffered from the poor security situation. Women especially faced the threat of being harassed and raped every time they moved inside the camps. The presence of relatives in return communities and the will to start a new life with their families are also mentioned by former IDPs as good reasons for returning.

Many returnees however complain about the insufficient transportation assistance they got, which sometimes forced them to sell a part of their return package or to do small jobs to gather the amount of money necessary to reach their home. Only vulnerable persons were trucked back home. Similarly, many people complained that the return package was not enough to start a new life. They especially regretted the absence of agricultural tools and seeds to do farming, particularly needed in a country where half of the population is vulnerable to food insecurity.

Water and sanitation, as well as health, are also urgent needs in return communities. Concerning health, communities suffer from the lack of clinics or, when there is one, of medicines. The main health problems encountered are malaria and diarrhoea. Also of concern is the rise in the number of tuberculosis cases, which may indicate an increase in HIV infections, particularly as a result of the massive population movement over the past year.

Regarding education, the return of many children from IDP camps has highlighted the lack of school buildings and materials (notebooks, pencils, registration cards...) in rural areas. Many teachers throughout the country are volunteers. Those who are on the government payroll are not regularly paid. In most cases, they are not qualified. School fees and the cost of uniforms are always presented as obstacles to sending children to school. In addition, adult returnees always ask for adult literacy programmes to be developed, as they especially appreciated this assistance in the camps.

Also of primary concern is the increase of domestic violence in return communities. This is a sensitive issue that women are always reluctant to report. Returnees justify such a rise by stress and post-war trauma. Food shortages were cited as well as being an incessant source of disputes between husbands and wives.

Another challenging issue is the lot of vulnerable people in return communities. Most fall into categories of elderly, handicapped, orphaned and/or, as mentioned above, single mothers, even though in most communities, single mothers are often expected to take on the additional role of primary care-taker for their family's vulnerable members. There is rarely any community initiative to assist vulnerable people. They are dependent on family members or, when they do not have any family, the generosity of neighbours. There are also many cases of vulnerable people who have received no assistance from humanitarian organisations.

Lessons Learned from the Liberian IDP Return Process

Various lessons may be drawn from the way in which the Liberian IDP return process was conducted.

Regrettably no specific registration procedure was held in view of the return process. The WFP feeding log was used as a baseline for repatriation, assuming that all IDPs willing to return were recorded on this log. Among the consequences of this method was a lack of proper tracing of IDPs in return communities. This had a significant impact on the quality of the follow-up assistance provided in return communities, in particular to vulnerable people.

The Liberian IDP return process also suffered from the lack of a clear division of roles between UN agencies. Before UNHCR was designated as the lead agency for camp management, UN agencies operated under the "collaborative approach", in which responsibility for the management and organisation of IDP returns fell to all participants and thus to no one. With the adoption and implementation of the new "cluster approach" in 2006, Liberia offers a valuable opportunity for the UN to evaluate whether its response to the challenges of IDP returns has effectively improved.

Many interviewed returnees complained about the lack of items to facilitate the reintegration in return areas, items such as seeds and farming tools. Returnees complained

as well about the small amount of money given for transportation back to return communities, which in most cases was not enough to reach home. These criticisms could be mitigated if IDPs, like refugees, were driven back home, instead of provided with transportation stipends, and given their return package in transit centres, instead of at the camps before leaving.

After the closure of the camps, the local communities which hosted thousand of IDPs over the years feel that they have been left behind. Indeed it seems that the withdrawal strategy of most humanitarian organisations operating in IDP camps did not include any transitional stage, which created a feeling of injustice in some local communities that may hamper the integration of IDPs looking to resettle on the sites of the former camps.

JRS also found that interviewed returnees unanimously acknowledged the benefit of the skills training that they received in IDP camps. This was in most cases the first answer given when respondents were asked to mention positive aspects about their IDP experience. Having new skills apparently encouraged many of them to return to their communities of origin. Some returnees however complained that they could not put their skills into practice as, in many cases, the start-up kits they received at the end of the training period were not sufficient to start any activity. In light of this experience, it is worth questioning how to encourage vocational training beneficiaries to put their skills into practice with the materials they receive and how to discourage those who would potentially sell their kits.

Displacement also gave IDPs the opportunity to receive an education. In IDP camps, children had access to schools supported by humanitarian organisations. Adults, for their part, could attend adult literacy programmes. To build on the population's exposure to learning opportunities, education should continue to remain a priority in the rebuilding of return communities, with a special emphasis on adult literacy courses.

Most returnees also acknowledge that displacement taught them to interact with other communities and ethnic groups. Their experience would be useful and should be highlighted by any organisations developing peace-building or education programmes, which are particularly needed in war-torn communities.

Finally, the study observed that war and displacement changed the role of women in society. As many found themselves in the camps without their husbands, women had to learn how to care for their families on their own. Many also acquired new skills in the camps and were taught to organise themselves in order to develop common initiatives. JRS noted that women returning home often take on more responsibilities in the community. But even though their responsibilities may have increased, women remain under-represented in the local decision-making process. The traditional male-dominated system still largely prevails. In many communities, women's recent prominence has been cited as a factor in domestic violence, seemingly because their heightened visibility in society is perceived as a "challenge" to men.

II. INTRODUCTION

A. Context

(1) Historical Background

Liberia is the first African Republic, founded in 1847 by freed slaves repatriated from the United States by philanthropic foundations, such as the *American Colonisation Society*. The country remained independent while almost all the African continent was colonised by European nations. However, the descendants of the freed slaves, *Americo-Liberians*, ruled the country in a way which excluded the indigenous population from access to power and from the benefits of economic growth. Native Liberians (as opposed to Americo-Liberians) gained the right to vote only in 1946. Despite the declared efforts of the Tubman (1944-1971) and Tolbert (1971-1980) presidencies in favour of the recognition of their rights, discrimination against them continued.

In 1980, Samuel K. Doe, a sergeant of the Liberian Army with indigenous roots, organised a coup d'état and took power after having brutally assassinated President Tolbert and some of his collaborators. This coup ushered in an era of violence in Liberia. Corruption, mismanagement and repression were characteristics of the ten years during which Samuel Doe ruled, before being overthrown by a rebellion launched in 1989 by Charles Taylor.

Sharing the similar fate as his predecessor, Samuel Doe was tortured and murdered in 1990 by a former lieutenant of Taylor's militia. The civil war, made infamous by massive human rights violations and the systematic recruitment of child soldiers, involved about half a dozen factions fighting for control over the Liberian government and its resources. A semblance of peace returned to Liberia in 1996 with the intervention of a peace-keeping force sent by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Largely through fear and intimidation, Charles Taylor won the elections organised in 1997, ushering in years during which terror and a high level of corruption reigned over the country. In 1999, a rebellion began in northern Liberia, led by a group, the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), armed and supported by Guinea and the United States. In early 2003, with LURD in control of northern Liberia, a second rebel group, called the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) and allegedly backed by the Ivorian government, emerged in southern Liberia and achieved rapid successes. By the summer, Taylor government controlled only about a third of Liberia: Monrovia and the central part of the country.

This new phase of violence and abuses ended in August 2003 when Charles Taylor, indicted for war crimes by the Special Court of Sierra Leone, was forced to step down and accepted to leave for exile in South Nigeria. The peace agreement signed in Accra in August 2003, which put an end to a conflict that killed 150,000 Liberians, was followed by the deployment of peace-keeping forces of the United Nation Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). UNMIL, then the largest UN mission in the world at 15,000 soldiers, was mandated to secure the country and lead the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) process of the rebel groups. The Peace Agreement also put in place an interim government, the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL), led by Liberian businessman, Charles G. Bryant. Despite accusations of corruption, the NTGL accomplished its main mission: guiding the country towards election within two year time.

On 23 November 2005, Liberians chose Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf as president of Liberia in credible and peaceful elections. The election of 67-year old Johnson-Sirleaf as the first female president of an African country has brought great hope for the stabilisation of Liberia. However, the tasks ahead of her, to bring durable peace and sustainable development to the country, are numerous.

(2) Chronology of the IDP Return Process in Liberia

Over 500,000 people are thought to have been internally displaced over the course of the 14-year civil war in Liberia. During the last period of fighting, which pitted President Charles Taylor against the rebel LURD and MODEL forces, many Liberians took refuge in Monrovia at the very moment that the rebels were advancing upon the Liberian capital. Many displaced Liberians took shelter in public buildings and some continue to live there today.

After the signing of the Accra Peace Agreement in August 2003, UN peacekeepers were deployed throughout the country to re-establish order in the outlying areas. While waiting for the peace to return before heading back home, many Liberians moved into formal camps and spontaneous settlements along the two main roads leading to Monrovia. The World Food Programme (WFP) registered 323,827 Liberians, including 314,095 internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 9,732 Liberian refugees who had returned spontaneously from Sierra Leone¹.

In the following year the security situation in the inner country seemed to be improving, most notably with the closure of the disarmament and demobilisation process at the end of October 2004. In November 2004, the return process of the IDP population began, which would assist displaced Liberians back to their counties of origin, mainly Lofa, Gbarpolu and Bomi Counties. A strategy document known as the “Community Resettlement and Reintegration Strategy,” produced by the NTGL in collaboration with the international community, provided the basis for the beginning of the return process.



Salala camp in December 2005

Following the promotion of the *cluster approach* as the new collaborative humanitarian response to IDP crisis on the international level², UNHCR assumed the principal role in July 2005 in coordinating and managing the protection services provided to IDPs in Liberia. On 1 January 2006, Liberia became one of only a few pilot countries testing the

¹ UNHCR Liberia, *IDP Camp Closure Assessment Report*, June 2006, P. 7

² See *infra* P. 43-46

cluster approach's implementation, along with the Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda.

On 20 April 2006, the Liberian Government and UNMIL representatives met in Salala camp to celebrate the official closure of the IDP return process in Liberia. From November 2004 to March 2006, 321,634 IDPs were deregistered and provided with a return package that contained food, non food items, and a cash transportation allowance³.



Salala camp in July 2006

Acknowledging the continued presence of people still living at the site of the former camps, the IDP Consultative Forum (ICF), the inter-agency body in charge of repatriation and reintegration activities⁴, agreed that UNHCR should conduct a multi-agency⁵ assessment exercise at the camp sites. Following the completion of this exercise in April-May 2006, an *IDP Camp Closure Assessment Report* was issued in June 2006, which recommended measures to repatriate the last IDPs and to clean-up the sites of the camps.

Between 15 and 17 August 2006, a three-day verification exercise was conducted in 29 former IDP camps. On 8 September 2006, the ICF agreed upon measures aiming to assist some of the individuals remaining at the camp sites, as well as some displaced people squatting in public and private buildings in Monrovia.

B. Objectives and Methodology

(1) Objectives

The overall objective of this report is to evaluate the IDP return process in Liberia, relying upon JRS' experience in serving and accompanying IDPs.

³ UNHCR Liberia, *IDP Camp Closure Assessment Report*, June 2006, P. 7

⁴ The ICF is composed of the heads of key UN agencies involved in the IDP return and reintegration process, as well as major donors, a representative of the Management Steering Group of NGOs, and two representatives of IDP leadership. It is co-chaired by the Executive Director of the Liberian Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC) and the Humanitarian Coordinator.

⁵ Comprising: ADEN, ADRA, AEL, ARC, CONCERN, EFA, IRC, LRRRC, LWF/WS, NRC, OXFAM, SC UK, UNMIL IDP Unit, WFP, WVI.

JRS was present for two years in 12 different camps in the Salala District of Bong County and in Montserrado County, assisting IDPs through educational projects including school financial support, vocational training and psycho-social accompaniment. JRS withdrew from the IDP camps in August 2005 in order to focus on areas of return. JRS is currently running reintegration projects – from school reconstruction to skills training and income-generating activities – in Bomi, Lofa and Nimba Counties.

Having experience working on both sides of the return process, JRS was encouraged to conduct its own evaluation of the IDP returns, an exercise that had not yet been undertaken in Liberia.

This study was designed to achieve the following specific objectives:

Internal objectives

- To reflect upon the IDP return process which JRS was able to witness when it was active in Liberian IDP camps.
- To improve JRS' services for, and its accompaniment of, IDPs and returnees in contexts of displacement similar to those found in Liberia.

External objectives:

- To serve as an advocacy tool on behalf of both the IDPs remaining at the sites of the former camps as well as those who returned to their local communities.
- To contribute to the wider debate on humanitarian assistance provided to IDPs by proposing recommendations for improving this assistance in the future.

(2) Methodology

This study involved visiting the sites of the camps where JRS was present, both in Salala District and in Montserrado County⁶, as well as communities of return in Lofa and Bomi, two counties in which JRS is particularly active and to where most of the IDPs returned⁷. According to UNHCR, out of the 401,538 IDPs assisted to return, 168,313 returned to Lofa County and 90,811 to Bomi County⁸.

The report does not focus on displaced persons still occupying public or private buildings in Monrovia, many of whom require assistance to return to their communities of origin. The ICF recently offered to assist 4,205 of these individuals to resettle to their communities of choice⁹.

Prior to JRS' field study, five questionnaires were designed and employed to determine the profile of those who would be the focus of interviews¹⁰. The first questionnaire was designed for IDPs still living at the sites of the former camps. Its emphasis was on the living conditions of these people, as well as on the reasons why they did not return to their

⁶ Other camps than those where JRS was present were also visited. See the list of the camps visited in Annex 2

⁷ See the list of the return communities visited in Annex 2

⁸ UNHCR, Liberia Operations At a Glance, 22 September 2006

⁹ ICF Meeting, 8 September 2006

¹⁰ See Annex 3

communities of origin. The second was designed for local communities surrounding the former camps. It aimed to study the relationship between local community members and IDPs remaining on the sites of the former camps. Two further questionnaires were used to interview returnees and return communities. These focused on the living conditions of these persons and the challenges they face to reintegrate. Some questions were inspired by the *UN Guidelines on Internal Displacement*¹¹ to verify if the rights of these people were being respected. Finally, the last questionnaire was designed to interview women and children in return communities. This questionnaire intended to highlight the specific needs of these persons, who are often more vulnerable than other returnees.

This report sums up the answers collected when interviewing IDPs still living at the sites of the former camps and returnees who have since go home. The report does not provide any first-hand quantitative data. It aims to give a general qualitative picture of the way in which the IDP return process took place in Liberia, as well as to draw some lessons for similar process that may occur in the future.



JRS assessing return communities in Lofa

¹¹ See Annex 6

¹⁴ UNHCR, *Liberia IDP Camp Closure Assessment Report*, June 2006, P. 4

III. IDPs REMAINING AT THE SITE OF THE FORMER CAMPS

As previously noted, IDP camps in Liberia were officially closed in April 2006. This event marked the end of the return process for the almost 320,000 IDPs who left for their communities of origin. When visiting the camp sites, however, one may find IDPs who still remain.

UNHCR, as the lead agency regarding IDP protection since July 2005, conducted a “Camp Closure Assessment Exercise” in April-May 2006, in order to:

- a. identify prevailing conditions and problems in the former camps;
- b. identify and recommend the appropriate response and responsible agency/governmental institution and to highlight funding requirements;
- c. agree on a work plan following assessment missions.¹⁴

The subsequent report, which covers 34 IDP camps and spontaneous settlements in Bong, Margibi and Montserrado Counties, is a comprehensive document. It contains many recommendations to respond to the needs of the remaining IDPs.

JRS does not intend to duplicate the work undertaken by UNHCR. The present report intends merely to highlight the challenges that continue to prevail at these sites despite the efforts of UNHCR and other bodies to address former IDP camp residents’ needs. In doing so, JRS hopes to encourage UNHCR, as well as other concerned agencies, to ensure a complete implementation of the recommendations made in the Camp Closure Assessment Report in as timely a manner as possible.

A. Population Remaining at the Former Camps

Two categories of people remain at the former camp sites. First, there are the former IDPs who are interested in settling in the local communities near the camps, and others among them who want to turn some former camps into new local communities. For these individuals, their continued presence in the former camps is a deliberate choice. According to the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, which is the text of reference regarding IDPs¹⁵, displaced persons should “*return voluntarily (...) to their homes or places of habitual residence, or resettle voluntarily in another part of the country*” (Principle 28-1). IDPs, like any other Liberian citizens, benefit from the freedom of movement guaranteed by Article 13 of the Liberian Constitution. As such, they are free to live in any part of the country they choose.

The second category of former IDPs still inhabiting these sites are those who have not been able to go back home despite an expressed desire to do so.

The UNHCR report provides some interesting statistics. The assessment identified 28,753 Liberians still living in the former camps. Among them, 16,324 were registered as members of the former camp’s population. They represent 5% of the total IDP population that once existed in the country.

In addition, there are about 12,492 Liberians (or 4% of the IDP population) who were not registered for repatriation. UNHCR reported that the “majority fall into the category of IDPs who were removed from WFP logs after a verification exercise in mid-2004.”

¹⁵ They are non-binding but authoritative instructions for States and humanitarian agencies on assistance and protection of IDPs during displacement and in return and resettlement. The Republic of Liberia ratified them.

Finally, there is also a small number of people who came to live in the camps after the verification process was completed, including some local residents who moved into the former camps after the IDPs left. There are also a number of IDPs who decided to go back to the former camps after having already returned to their communities of origin.

Combining these figures with the two categories of people identified at the former camp sites, one could estimate that about 17,000 Liberians are willing to remain in the former camps, while about 12,000 are eager to return but could not. However, some doubts could be raised about the accuracy of UNHCR's estimates.



IDPs remaining at former E.J Yancee camp (Salala District)

Initially UNHCR proposed to physically count every inhabitant remaining in the former IDP camps, but this was not able to be implemented due to logistic difficulties. In the end UNHCR arrived at an approximation by taking a sample of housing measurements and multiplying these by the number of occupied shelters. Some doubts are permitted regarding this approach. According to the data provided in the report, more than half of the remaining population has received the return package. The houses of these assisted people were supposed to have been demolished. It is possible these people sought refuge in relatives' houses or in some of the houses classified as "damaged / abandoned" or "under construction", etc. that were not taken into account in UNHCR's study. Consequently, the standard ratio of people to houses employed by UNHCR would result in an under-estimation of the actual population size.

Furthermore, most IDP leaders interviewed by JRS in the former camps reported higher population numbers than those given by the UNHCR report. Though it is difficult to know how accurate their estimates are either, particularly significant are the cases of Perry, Blamasee, Maimu I, Maimu III and Salala camps where the difference between both figures is more than half.

B. Former IDPs Willing to Remain at the Site of the Camps

As previously noted, the first category of people encountered in visiting the camps are former IDPs who are looking to settle in Bong, Margibi and Montserrado Counties, where displaced camps used to be situated.

(1) Reasons for Remaining at the Site of the Camps

Former IDPs offer three main reasons why they want either to stay at the camp sites or to integrate into nearby local communities: intermarriage, proximity to basic services, and absence of family ties in return areas.

Intermarriages

A small number of IDPs have developed family ties with the local surrounding communities through marriage. These IDPs preferred to stay with their spouse rather than return to their community of origin.

Proximity to Basic Services

One of the main reasons given by Liberians choosing to stay at the site of the former camps is their close proximity to services that are not available in their region of origin. The IDP camps were settled along the two main roads leading to Monrovia: the road coming from the North, which passes through Bong and Margibi Counties, and the road from the West going through Montserrado County. Staying in the camps is a way to remain connected to the capital, especially for IDPs coming from counties that have few means of communication, such as Grand Cape Mount, Lofa or Gbarpolu Counties. Monrovia, with its hospitals, universities, schools, and businesses, remains the center of attraction in a country¹⁶ where the little infrastructure that existed before the war has been all but destroyed.

Indeed, the lack or poor quality of basic services in the regions of return is widely reported by former IDPs as a reason to stay in the camps. Specifically, some families with school age children have decided to stay in the camps to allow their children to complete the school year. Many complained about repatriations that took place in the middle of the academic year. Some of them might have returned in August, after the closure of schools for the summer break. Other families have decided to integrate into local communities because of the lack of schools in their regions of origin. For instance, there are no secondary schools in the Suehn-Mecca District of Bomi County, one of the counties that is now home to most of the returnees in Liberia. Some of the families that were interviewed said they plan on staying at the former camp sites until their children finish school. Meanwhile, there are also families who have returned to their homes and have left behind children at the camps. The vast majority of these families have teenagers in higher school. The students typically stay with a relative or a friend and attend schools in the local community near the camp.

Former IDPs also cite the absence of appropriate health services in home regions as a reason to stay in the camps. Again, the proximity to Monrovia hospitals, or to Phebe

¹⁶ About 1.5 million out of 3.5 millions Liberians live in Monrovia.

Hospital¹⁷ in the case of people remaining in camps in Bong County, is a factor promoting the integration of former IDPs into the local host community.



Former Konola Town camp (Margibi County), located along the highway to Monrovia

A final group of Liberians have chosen to stay in the camps due to financial constraints, having learned from other returnees that their house back home is uninhabitable yet finding in their current situation that they have no means to rebuild.

Absence of Family Ties in Return Areas

Some IDPs chose to stay in former camp areas because they no longer have any relatives living in their home community. As UNHCR notes in its report, “*These individuals considered themselves to be alone either in the camp, in the areas of return, or indeed in both locations.*”¹⁸ Family solidarity becomes particularly important for survival in rural areas that are dependent on a subsistence lifestyle. Without that guarantee of support, few are willing to risk going back. This is even more true for vulnerable people, i.e. the elderly, single mothers or the disabled, who prefer to stay in the former camps rather than return to a region where they have no one to assist them. At least in the camps, they remain close to the hospitals in Monrovia.

Cases of IDPs Who Came Back After Returning Home

Among the different profiles of individuals who still live in the former IDP camps are those who had gone back to their places of origin but who have since returned to the camps. People in this group, whom interviewers could meet for example in Salala and Perry camps, complained about difficulties in rebuilding their lives in the areas of return. These individuals were often critical of the return assistance they received, which they noted lacked farming tools and seeds. They would typically leave their families behind in the camps while they evaluated the situation in their community of origin. When they came back to the camp to collectively weigh their options, many decided to stay put in the camp. There they had grown used to a certain lifestyle, they knew how to make ends meet and

¹⁷ Phebe Hospital, located in Bong County not far from the city of Gbarnga, is the best hospital in Liberia after hospitals in Monrovia.

¹⁸ UNHCR, *Liberia IDP Camp Closure Assessment Report*, June 2006, P. 13

they expected to be able to get approval from the landowner to build a house and start farming.

(2) Challenges

Successful integration of those interested in staying at the camps depends largely on the following factors: the relationship with local communities, land issues, humanitarian assistance, and security and protection.

Relationship with Local Communities

Generally, IDPs claimed to have good relationships with their local community. Most of the IDP leaders said that they were invited to the local community meetings, which they took as a sign of being well integrated. Some caution needs to be exercised in giving this claim too much weight though. From the local communities' point of view, integration is not so simple. Interviews with host communities, like near former Maimu I, II and III camps, revealed that they do not consider those IDPs who remain in the area to be new members of their community. They still carry the status of displaced persons which places them on the margins of the community.

Camp leaders in Maimu I and II, Ricks, Wilson, and E.J. Yancee mentioned having a poor relationship with the local community. Inevitably, these poor relationships were linked to the question of land tenure¹⁹. In every instance involving disputes over property rights, tensions were high between IDPs and the local community. Such situations led to far-reaching struggles over other resources as well, such as the use of the bush or access to water.

Two other social factors that play a significant role in the integration of IDPs into the local community are the personal relationships between local chiefs and IDP leaders, as well as the number of intermarriages linking the two population groups. Relations between IDPs and the local communities were also impacted by the community's access to those services offered by humanitarian organisations working with IDPs. When community members were excluded from the benefits to which IDPs had access, a feeling of injustice developed among community members that typically grew more tense later on.

Land Issues

In general, IDPs mentioned good or cordial relationships with the landowners of the camps. However, in Maimu I and II, E.J. Yancee, Plumkor and Wilson, relationships were reported to be difficult. In three camps, Konola, Ricks, and Wilson, IDPs said that landowners forbid them to cultivate land. In these last cases, landowners see the presence of IDPs on their land as only being temporary. The end of the rainy season was frequently mentioned by landowners as the anticipated period of departure for the IDPs. If IDPs were to decide to remain on the land though, even after the rainy season, it is likely that tensions would grow between the owners and them.

Only in one camp, Maimu III, did IDPs speak of a formal agreement with the landlord allowing them to remain at the camp site. In the other camps visited, such agreements were made informally and typically went only so far as to grant IDPs the right to stay on the owners' land until they received assistance to go home. According to UNHCR, *"The period*

¹⁹ See *Infra* P. 19-20

for which people have been allowed to remain was generally unclear, as landlords appeared to be making plans for future use of their land.”²⁰

In many camps, IDPs interested in settling locally initiated negotiations with landowners, and owners have reportedly been open to making agreements with them. However, as noted by UNHCR, *“The inclusion of persons with special needs in arrangements with landowners [is] not systematic. In some areas, this group was part of the negotiations and individuals were well-informed, yet in other locations individuals with special needs were observed to be unsure about arrangements being made for the land.”²¹* This finding raises concerns about the future of this population.

Landowners may find it in their own interest to accept IDPs settling on their land, as seen in the case of Baysah Farm located few kilometres outside Tottota town, Salala District.²² First, assuming responsibility for a tenant population of any size involves coordination of resources, decision-making and investments in the community. From simple farmers, they may become community leaders. Close involvement with IDPs may also bring opportunities to develop services on their land. As can be seen throughout Liberia today, humanitarian organisations may show an interest in building water and sanitation systems, clinics or schools in order to assist former IDPs in their reintegration. Furthermore, in some instances landlords may use IDPs as a labour force. While these services are not always rewarded monetarily, owners are not typically known to ask IDPs for such compensation, if any at all, in return for the right to remain on the land.



Former IDPs in E.J Yancee camp relocated in Baysah Farm (Salala District)

In fact, landowners who hosted camps did not receive compensation for the public use of their lands despite the many years of displaced peoples' presence. They did however benefit from the infrastructure installed by UN agencies or NGOs. Sometimes this contributes to tensions between IDPs who remain and owners, as owners may be eager to

²⁰ UNHCR, *Liberia IDP Camp Closure Assessment Report*, June 2006, P. 15

²¹ *Idem*

²² In Baysah Farm, Mr. Baysah, the landlord, proposed to IDPs previously living in E.J Yancee camp to stay on his land. Since then, the land has been developed with the construction of one primary school, latrines and one well.

begin to use the infrastructure left behind on their land. For example, in some former camps, remaining IDPs accused landlords of stealing parts off of the hand water pumps for their private use and in an effort to force the IDPs to leave.

Humanitarian Assistance

IDPs willing to stay in former camps have the same needs as elsewhere in Liberia. After 14 years of civil war, basic infrastructure needs to be rebuilt both in areas of return and in host communities for remaining IDPs.

In fact, due to the withdrawal of humanitarian organisations from the former camps, these needs have even increased. The vast majority of aid agencies left the camps and the surrounding areas before the official closure of Liberia's IDP return process. In many cases, NGOs did not plan any transitional phase in their exit strategy. When closing their projects, some organisations even went so far as to remove the materials they had previously installed in the camps, as was the case in Salala with water installations. These actions negatively impacted both the lives of IDPs and the local communities. Very few NGOs remain and even fewer have come back since the official closure of the camps. IDPs complained that most of those who returned only did so to ask questions and this was rarely if ever followed by any assistance.

The main area of concern mentioned by residents of the former camps is health. Interviewers listened to many complaints about the lack of clinics and medicine. This was followed by needs related to shelter (most of the houses inadequately protect against rain), water and sanitation, and food. Concerning food, even those who maintain gardens in the proximity of their homes cited food as an urgent need. Small gardens are not sufficient for the subsistence of the remaining IDPs. The lack of space available for farming in the former camps raises concern about food security now and in the future.

To that extent, the recommendations made by UNHCR in its camp assessment report to build four clinics and install 15 wells in local communities nearby former IDP camps²⁴ are welcome and should be implemented by the concerned agencies: UNICEF for water and sanitation and WHO for health. Such support to local communities is a beginning and should be followed by further involvement of humanitarian organisations in the rebuilding and rehabilitation of the areas where IDP camps used to be located.

IDPs in the camps of Plunkor and Perry in Montserrado County also mentioned other needs such as clothes and even skills training.

Most IDPs get by thanks to various odd jobs like burning coal, helping farmers, taping, etc. The significant number of IDPs who cultivate a private garden rely on sales of their vegetables in the community market to help make ends meet. Only a very few IDPs run small businesses. However, out of those who do, remarkably, almost all are former beneficiaries of skills training courses.

The sense of leadership and responsibility among remaining IDPs, as well as within the local communities, should be particularly promoted.

²⁴ UNHCR, *Liberia IDP Camp Closure Assessment Report*, June 2006, P. 5

²⁶ *Idem*, Recommendation 7.3

When implementing the recommendations made in the UNHCR camp assessment report, “a *specific emphasis*, as pointed out by the UN agency, *should be placed upon mobilising communities and developing leadership skills in view of the general dependency of the population*”²⁶. In particular, such effort should focus on “*local authorities and community leadership in making decisions and implementing recommendations*”²⁷

Education is also a great matter of concern in former IDP camps. Most IDP children have not attended classes since the NGO-sponsored camp schools closed down. Parents, in almost all cases, cannot afford school fees as they are already struggling to make ends meet. Teachers receive poor pay and irregular payments, if they receive any at all. While the plight of children is certainly difficult, the problems facing teachers are the most critical issues for education in Liberia today.



Community school in former New Land IDP camp (Margibi County)

To that extent, the UNHCR report’s recommendation to build three schools is welcome. However, it is just a beginning. There will not be any durable solution for IDPs without further investment by the Liberian government and humanitarian organisations in the rebuilding of the education system in areas where former IDP camps were located. Of particular importance are the following areas: efforts to support ways for teachers to sustain themselves (i.e. school agriculture projects), maintenance of existing schools (i.e. supplying materials), and reduction of school fees to allow more IDP and local community children to attend school.

Security and Protection

The problem of night-time theft was mentioned as one of the main security and protection concerns. Generally speaking, incidences of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) seem to have diminished since the closure of the camps. Domestic violence in the former camps, as in return communities, is the main problem mentioned by remaining IDPs and local communities nearby the former camps²⁸.

²⁷ *Idem*

²⁸ For more details, see *infra* P. 22 and 36-37

These findings are confirmed by the UNHCR report: *“The main concerns as perceived and reported by the population itself were predominantly theft and domestic violence. NRC [Norwegian Refugee Council] monitors and other agency staff, in addition to LNP officers and local authorities who were interviewed, referred to a low level of other protection problems including child labour, child abuse, early marriage, physical assault and rape.”*²⁹

IDP communities often try to resolve these problems at the community level first. If that does not work, they go to the police or to the closest local community.

C. Former IDPs who Could not Return to their Communities of Origin

(1) Reasons Why They Could not Return

Former IDPs who were not able to return to their communities of origin gave two main reasons to explain why they still live in the former IDP camps: not having received return assistance at all or having received return assistance that proved inadequate to get them home.

The Registration Process

The first category of persons who could not return home are those who did not receive the return package. In its study, UNHCR reported, *“In a significant number of former camps, individuals told the team that they remain there because they did not receive a repatriation package,”*³⁰ confirming the situation JRS encountered. The following various reasons shed light on why these individuals did not receive any assistance.

First, there are those who were not registered to receive the return package. To qualify for the return package, IDPs initially had to have been registered by the camp management committees³¹ between September 2003 and February 2004. It was during this period that the vast majority of IDPs moved to the camps, having come from Monrovia and the surroundings communities during the last phase of the war. For those IDPs arriving after February 2004, a second registration exercise was conducted the following August by the Liberian Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC), WFP and their implementing partners³². This second exercise, which was also known as the *“Consolidation of IDP Camps”*, was held between August and September 2004. As part of this exercise, a census based on the number of IDP shelters was carried out. Huts classified as *“unoccupied”*, *“damaged / abandoned”*, *“under-construction”* or *“non-existent”* were disqualified from the WFP feeding log. According to UNHCR, *“Upon completion of the exercise a decrease of 13,918 beneficiaries was recorded”*³³.

Among the IDPs living at the site of the former camps today are those whose huts were withdrawn from the WFP log during that second registration period. Many of them spoke of the conditions under which that second registration exercise occurred. They described how the census coincided with the May-September rainy season, whose heavy rains

²⁹ UNHCR, *Liberia IDP Camp Closure Assessment Report*, June 2006, P. 11

³⁰ *Idem*, P. 12

³¹ Composed of camp leadership and camp management agencies.

³² LWF, ADRA, CRS, Caritas, UMCOR, NRC, LIURC.

³³ UNHCR, *Liberia IDP Camp Closure Assessment Report*, June 2006, P. 51

damaged some shelters to the point that they appeared uninhabitable despite still housing displaced Liberians. According to those met for example in Wilson camp or in Perry camp, many houses were thus disqualified, resulting in the loss of access to services for residents who were technically IDPs.

In addition, interviewers encountered cases of people still living at the former camp sites, like in Maimu I, II and III, Salala, Tumutu, E.J Yancee or Blamasseh, who had been absent from the camps when the 'consolidation' exercises took place, as well as cases of those who had arrived in the IDP camps after the second registration process was completed. Consequently, neither of these two categories of residents were recognised as IDPs even though some originate from the main regions of displacement in Liberia. Like other IDPs, they reported not being able to return home due to a lack of means.

Distribution of the Return Package

Other IDPs remaining at the site of the former camps were registered on the WFP log but did not receive the return package. Some of these individuals claimed that they were not in the camps when the distribution took place.



IDPs receiving food in Salala camp, February 2006

There are also cases of displaced persons who, according to UNHCR, "*allegedly received only part of the return assistance*"³⁴. This may be explained by the way in which the return packages were distributed. Occasional shortages of certain goods allegedly prevented WFP from distributing all the items in the return package at the same time.

Cost of Transportation

Finally, there is the category of IDPs who received the whole return package but who were unable to leave the area due to insufficient transportation assistance. According to them, the transportation allowance they received did not enable them to pay for the trip home. This is especially true for people who live far from the former camps and in counties difficult to access.

³⁴ *Idem*, P. 13

According to UNHCR, “Prices were reportedly inflated after the transport industry gained the impression that IDPs had received large sums of cash as part of the return package”³⁵. This explanation, however valid it may be, does not present the whole picture. The rhythm of return accelerated in mid-2005, encouraged by UNHCR and camp management agencies in anticipation of the presidential elections to be held that November. Consequently, many people received their transportation allowance during the rainy season. However, according to them, this allowance was calculated for the dry season, when roads are better for travel. During the rainy season though, roads deteriorate quickly and the cost of transportation increases as truck and taxi drivers take into account the higher risk of getting stranded or stuck. IDPs who planned on traveling to counties that were far from the camps or whose roads were in poor condition thus found their transportation allowance inadequate to get them home. Furthermore, some IDPs consider the transportation assistance to have simply been not enough regardless of the season. This view is supported by testimonies from returnees. Liberians, in Lofa County especially, admitted that they were obliged to sell part of their return package or do small jobs to earn enough money to go back home.

Overall, these criticisms highlight how the transportation aspect of the IDP return process was poorly organised. At the start of the process, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) provided rides to any registered IDPs interested in going back home. This assistance was reduced in 2005 though when IOM decided to repatriate only vulnerable people. Afterwards, IDPs were given a transportation allowance, calculated according to the number of family members and the distance to home. As previously noted, IDPs in general considered this assistance insufficient. This example also serves to illustrate an underlying lack of coordination between agencies overseeing the return process³⁶.

(2) Challenges

Repatriate the Excluded IDPs

The principal challenge is to assist those IDPs left out of the registration process to return to their communities of origin. While the IDP camps may have been officially closed in May, the return process, on the other hand, will only end when the last of the IDPs are back home.

Following their April-May 2006 assessment at the sites of the former IDP camps, UNHCR began looking for the financial support necessary to repatriate “an estimated 13,000 IDPs who were previously registered and then disqualified from WFP logs[, those who] were not included in the final verification exercise in June 2004”³⁷. UNHCR proposed to provide these people with food and non food items after having driven them to transit centres located in the main city of the return areas. Beneficiaries were also entitled to grants of 5 USD for additional transportation costs to their community of origin.

From 15-17 August 2006, UNHCR led a verification exercise coordinating 140 staff from 10 agencies³⁸ in 29 camps. At the end of the operation, the number of IDPs waiting to be assisted was revised. Out of the 13,000 people believed to remain in the camps, only 5,480

³⁵ *Idem*, P. 13

³⁶ See *Infra* P. 43-46

³⁷ UNHCR Liberia, *IDP Camp Closure Assessment Report*, June 2006, P. 5

³⁸ Comprising: ADEN, ADRA, AEL, ARC, CONCERN, EFA, IRC, LRRRC, LWF/WS, NRC, OXFAM, SC UK, UNMIL IDP Unit, WFP, WVI.

qualified to return to 12 counties. Two groups of people were considered eligible. First, the so-called “no-show cases”, those who did not show up to receive the offered assistance before the camp closures despite holding valid WFP ration cards. Second, there were the “deleted cases”, those whose names had been removed from the WFP database in 2004-05 even if they possessed WFP ration cards. 7,687 people did not meet the eligibility criteria since they were not listed in the WFP database.

Previously in this report, doubts were raised about the way in which the counting of remaining IDPs had been carried out during the assessment exercise in April-May. Similar doubts may be expressed about how this latest verification was conducted. Of particular concern is the likelihood that errors may have been committed due to haste, given that 29 camps were scheduled to be studied in only one day. Such a short period of time appears insufficient to allow a thorough evaluation.

On 8 September 2006, the ICF ratified these figures, agreeing to assist the eligible population to return to their communities of origin. Mid-December, UNHCR announced that it assisted the last IDPs to return home. 5,245 individuals were trucked to their communities of origin and given the same return assistance than returnees received (4-month food rations and non-food items).⁴⁰

Cases of Vulnerable Persons

Another challenge concerns vulnerable IDPs who are willing to return to their counties of origin though who have not received any aid. They should benefit from the promised assistance as soon as possible.

In the first assessment exercise, UNHCR estimated that “up to 400 persons with special needs, comprising mostly unaccompanied elderly, physically disabled and single parents, of whom the majority were either female or elderly”⁴¹ were eligible for repatriation. At the end of the August verification, a total of 68 individuals, along with their 313 dependants, were identified as persons with special needs eligible for assistance. 152 individuals with 559 dependants were considered ineligible.

As for the other IDPs excluded from return assistance, doubts exist about the procedures used in the assessment.

Concerning “eligible” vulnerable persons, the recommendation in the UNHCR camp assessment report to provide “individual counselling for persons identified with special needs to jointly review their options with them and the community, and to put in place individual plans that address their long-term survival”⁴³ is especially welcome and should be implemented in order to address the “eligible” vulnerable population’s needs.

⁴⁰ UNHCR, Liberia Operations At Glance, 12 December 2006

⁴¹ UNHCR Liberia, *IDP Camp Closure Assessment Report*, June 2006, P. 5

⁴³ *Idem*, Recommendation 7.5



An old disabled man remaining in Salala camp

The UNHCR camp assessment report also recommends making “shelter programmes available to persons with special needs particularly in Lofa, Gbarpolu, and Bomi Counties”⁴⁴. To ensure that other needs are not overlooked, follow-up assessments of “eligible” vulnerable people should be carried out in areas of return in conjunction with the recommended shelter programmes.

⁴⁴ *Idem*, Recommendation 7.7

⁴⁶ UNDP, UNICEF, WFP, UNHCR, Joint Action Plan for a Community Based Recovery and Restoration of Social Services in Liberia, 2006 – 2007, P. 6

IV. RETURNEES

A. The Return Process

(1) General View

Reasons to Return

IDPs started going back home in 2005. Many waited until after the presidential elections in November 2005 before making the trip home. The great majority of them said that they were happy to be back. Improvements in security in their home region and the desire to return to normal life were the most frequently cited reasons for going back. *“There is nowhere better than home”* is a sentence often heard in return communities. Many people interviewed expressed their satisfaction at again having full control over their life.

They especially enjoy their rediscovered freedom of movement. While in IDP camps, residents encountered frequent problems with members of the local community when going into the bush for ordinary tasks. Women incurred the risk of being harassed or raped every time they moved inside or around the camps.

Overall, returnees considered camp life to be difficult, even though they were provided with food and services. An often heard complaint was that IDPs had to pay camp managers to get housing materials that were supposed to be free. Those who could not pay were often homeless. Consequently, they would not be registered and would not be entitled to the return assistance to get back home. Some said that they came back home on foot.

In addition to these reasons, many returnees also came back before the 2005 rainy season (April-October) in order to start farming. The presence of relatives in return communities was also a strong draw for many to go back home. Contrary to expectations, assistance provided by UN agencies was never mentioned by returnees as a factor in the decision to return. Some IDPs even made the journey home without waiting to receive their promised return package.

Composition of Return Communities

Most returnees have resettled in their communities of origin. The ethnic composition of the communities remains largely the same as before the war. In Lofa County, some people who returned recently are waiting in the main towns (Voinjama, Kolahun, Foya) for the arrival of the dry season, before continuing on to the more remote villages.

In Bomi County, the situation is a bit different. For starters, there are more new residents in the local communities of Bomi than in Lofa. This is mainly due to Bomi’s closer proximity to former camps. Some of those who could not afford to reach their areas of origin opted to settle in Bomi. Similarly, those who no longer had relatives in their places of birth or whose houses were seriously damaged in the war preferred to move to Bomi. Another compelling advantage over Lofa County was Bomi’s shorter distance to Monrovia, which allows for easier access to the capital’s many services.

There were some similarities between the two counties though. Most notably, relationships formed in the camps played a major role in decisions of resettling. For married couples

originating from different communities, one spouse might end up returning to the other's community of origin. Likewise, friends or neighbors might invite those they met in the camps to continue their acquaintance back at their home town or village.

Single Mothers

Many returnees are single mothers, a trend that is due to the war's high rate of male casualties. It highlights the need for assistance in return communities to focus on single mothers.



A single mother and her elderly mother in Zolowo (Lofa)

However, the proposal in the Action Plan for Community Based Recovery and Restoration of Social Services in Liberia, launched jointly by UNDP, UNICEF, WFP and UNHCR for 2006-2007, which endorses “empowering women and girls so as to enable them to address their needs in order to minimise or eradicate their abuse and exploitation”⁴⁶, offers no concrete recommendations for action. When asked for ideas to help improve their self-reliance, single mothers suggested the development of shelter programmes, income-generating activities and agricultural projects they could participate in. To that extent, UNDP should implement the Joint Action Plan⁴⁷ which recommends “support [for] women’s groups with micro credit and micro project facilities to improve their socio-economic status through Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) programmes”.

Vulnerable People

Many vulnerable people can be found in return communities. Most fall into categories of elderly, handicapped, orphaned and/or, as mentioned above, single mothers, even though in most communities, single mothers are not considered to be vulnerable. In fact, these

⁴⁷ *Idem*, P. 11

⁴⁹ *Idem*, P. 9

women are often expected to take on the additional role of primary care-taker for their family's vulnerable members.

There is rarely any community initiative to assist vulnerable people. They are dependent on family members or, when they do not have any family, the generosity of neighbours. There are also many cases of vulnerable people who have received no assistance from humanitarian organisations. This tends to show a lack of monitoring of vulnerable individuals' transition from the displaced camps to the return communities.

More assistance should be directed towards vulnerable people in return communities. In particular, UNHCR should develop *"700 shelter programmes for vulnerable groups in the main return Counties"*, as recommended in the UN agencies Joint Action Plan for Community Based Recovery and Restoration of Social Services in Liberia⁴⁹.

(2) Assessment of the Return Process

The general perception of the process is positive. This is mainly due to the fact that people were eager to come back to their communities of origin.

Registration

However, many of the returnees interviewed complained about the registration procedure of the return process. Mistakes were made during this procedure and were not corrected when signalled. For instance, although some people had tickets to receive resettlement packages, their name did not appear on the log, which then prevented them from benefiting from any assistance at all. Similarly, some people's county or community of origin were recorded incorrectly. This meant that they may have received inadequate transportation assistance and therefore may not have been able to reach the distribution site for the second food ration⁵⁰.

Transportation Assistance and Return Package

The great majority of people interviewed expressed dissatisfaction regarding the transportation assistance. The first people to be assisted home were repatriated by IOM. This assistance stopped rapidly and afterwards only vulnerable persons were eligible for rides. Single mothers, although considered vulnerable by UNHCR standards, were excluded from this new arrangement.

The other IDPs received an amount of money according to their destination. As already noted, people complained that the allotments were based on travel costs in the dry season, even though a lot of people returned during the rainy season. Consequently, many returnees had to sell a part of the return package or do small jobs to gather the amount of money necessary to go back home. In other cases, some returnees were forced to leave some of their goods in the camps as the transportation assistance proved insufficient to repatriate both people and belongings.

Many people also complained that the return package was not enough to start a new life. The absence of farming tools and seeds was cause for particular disappointment in returnees. There was even demand for loans to start small businesses. The International

⁵⁰ This problem was mentioned both in Lofa (in Konia, Johnny's Town, Zawordemai, Kosemai, Lewalazu, Boi, David Selmah-Ta Town) and Bomi Counties (Suehn, Zwaih, James Bryant, Gaie Town).

Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and some other humanitarian organisations distributed seeds and farming tools in the main communities. Such distributions were welcomed by the communities, despite the late arrival of seeds, in some cases, which were distributed after the beginning of the farming season in May.

In addition, people interviewed were upset about not receiving the 150 USD per person return allowance that was initially promised to help them resettle. The sum returnees received is small compared to the 350 USD ex-combatants received. This difference was sometimes a source of incomprehension among returnees.

Information about Areas of Return

Most interviewees reported being well-informed about the situation in their communities of origin before heading back. In many cases, they either got this information on their own by traveling to villages themselves or through reports by relatives, friends or members of their community. In some instances, members of the same community pooled money to fund “go and see” visits. The media was also mentioned as a source of information, especially concerning the security situation in the regions of return. However, unlike refugees, IDPs rarely mentioned the UN as a good information provider.

Timing

Many people were disappointed that repatriations took place during the rainy season and in the middle of the academic year. Indeed, these elements were presented as reasons for some IDPs to remain in the now closed camps. Concerning education, as already mentioned, children are sometimes left with a relative or friend at the sites of the former camps to complete their education. This is true more for adolescents in the final school grades than children in early grades.



Road of Lofa County during the rainy season

Second Food Distribution

Many complaints were heard about the distribution of the second food ration that returnees were entitled to receive two months after having returned. In many cases, the information about when the distribution days were supposed to occur was not well

publicised by LRRRC in charge of organising the distribution. IDPs in villages located far from the distribution centres had to make several trips to finally receive their ration. Long distances deterred some people, especially vulnerable people or those without the means to travel⁵¹.

(3) Relationship between Returnees and Return Communities

In most of the communities visited, relationships among local residents were reported as fine. Some communities even mentioned improvements in relationships compared to before the war. The sense of solidarity has increased among community members as they all faced similar problems.

Reintegration of Returnees in Local Communities

Returnees do not face any problems reintegrating in their communities of origin, the majority of residents having been themselves displaced. Many share the same needs and the same difficulties in starting a new life. In addition, in many villages visited in the country's interior, people are inter-related. These family links also help facilitate good relationships between community members.

In all instances, returnees were said to be active participants in community meetings and civic life. Principle 29-1 of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement states that indeed returnees *"shall have the right to participate fully and equally in public affairs."* In Liberia, due to the high number of people having been displaced, there is virtually no discrimination between them and the rest of the population.

Land Issues

According to Principle 29-2 of the International Guiding Principle, *"competent authorities have the duty and responsibility to assist returned and/or resettled internally displaced persons to recover, to the extent possible, their property, and possessions which they left behind or were disposed upon their displacement."*

Very few cases of land disputes were mentioned in the communities visited. In those few instances though, community authorities, typically the town chief and the assembly of elders, worked to resolve the disputes, sometimes relocating people if necessary. Relocations are eased though, because in the interior, land often belongs to the local communities, which distribute it equally between residents. Therefore, when there is a dispute, the community can easily give a new piece of land to one or the other plaintiff. In some areas visited, like in Kolahun town, the community took care to ensure that the properties of people still displaced were not occupied by other residents.

Harmony in Return Communities

In the communities surveyed, there was little reported jealousy or rivalry between people who received assistance, like former IDP or refugee camp inhabitants, and those who did not benefit from any help. In general, these communities perceive the return of IDPs positively. However, in some cases, it was acknowledged that some rivalries occurred in the initial stages of the return process. These rivalries are reported to have quickly

⁵¹ This problem was mentioned by communities visited both in Lofa County (Vezela, Zolowa, Konia, Boi) and in Bomi County (Zwaih, James Bryant, Gaie Town)

disappeared once people recognised that their needs and difficulties in starting over were similar. In addition, family ties tend to increase solidarity and minimise differences between those who were assisted and those who were not.

Nevertheless, in some communities, people had the feeling that ex-combatants were a privileged group compared to others, though they did not see any reasons justifying such a difference in treatment. In most areas however, ex-fighters were said to have integrated well into the community. Apparently ex-fighters participate actively in community life, especially those who put to use skills they learned in vocational training courses designed for them.

B. The Reintegration of Returnees

(1) Needs of Returnees and Return Communities

Food Security

Food and shelter were described as the first and most urgent needs. Only 20% of the population consumes adequate levels of food⁵². The majority of Liberians have unsatisfactory consumption patterns characterised by low food diversity and a low frequency of daily food intake. Childhood malnutrition is high with 39% of children under five stunted, 86% of children between 6 to 23 months anaemic and 53% deficient in vitamin A⁵³. Food will remain a problem at least until the first harvest in September-October. People only restarted farming this year. Because of food shortages, the construction or rehabilitation of houses has been delayed, since people were focusing instead on ways to acquire food. Many garden, make charcoal, hunt bush animals, or sell palm oil in order to pay for food items.

However, as already mentioned, in most of the communities visited, people talked about the lack of seeds and farming tools. This could be seen as evidence of their desire to develop activities in order to be self-sufficient.



Children supplied with food in Lofa

To that extent, seed distributions are welcome and should be extended throughout the country for the next year, until the population is self-reliant. WFP and UNHCR should

⁵² UN Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) for Liberia, 2006

⁵³ UN CAP 2006

particularly implement the recommendations made in the Joint Action Plan to distribute food and farming tools, as well as to develop agricultural capacity programmes for Community Based Recovery and Restoration of Social Services in Liberia⁵⁴.

Shelter

In the area of shelter, metal roofing distribution programmes, which provide one of the most widely sought-after materials for housing, are currently being offered to Liberians. Many communities have already benefited from such programmes. In a great number of these communities though, people were disappointed that such distributions were done at the early stage of the return process before they had come back or were geared only to vulnerable people. This has created feelings of frustration for some. Some villages witnessed a lack of follow-through on the part of aid organisations who told community members to prepare wooden polls to receive the metal sheets but never came back to deliver the promised goods.

According to the Joint Action Plan, UNHCR should support 10,000 family units within shelter programme.⁵⁶ More generally, zinc roofing and material distribution programmes should be carefully monitored in order to respond to the needs of all returnees, even those who came late. There should also be a strict follow-up in order to avoid not keeping promises.

Health and WATSAN

Water, sanitation, and health are also considered to be priority needs. Concerning health, communities lack clinics. Those that do have clinics, though, operate without the necessary supply of medicine or proper water and sanitation systems. This may help explain Liberia's alarming health indicators. Average life expectancy in the country is 41 years. The child mortality rate, which stands at 157 deaths for every 1,000 children, and the maternal mortality rate, 580 deaths for every 100,000 mothers, are among the highest in the world⁵⁷.

The engagement taken by the Liberian Government in its Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy launched in June to re-establish the National Water Resources and Sanitation Board and to develop a comprehensive institutional reform plan for the sector⁵⁸ is welcome and should be implemented. The Government should also give an account of the implementation of its former promise made in the 150-day Action Plan to construct "*one hundred new water points and 52 boreholes around the country*"⁵⁹.

The main health problems encountered are malaria and diarrhoea. Risks of diarrhoea are increased by the lack of proper sanitation facilities, as rivers and streams become contaminated by raw sewage, especially during the rainy season. In addition, due to the lack of medical services, there are many cases of complicated deliveries that are not treated on time because women either deliver at home or go to the clinic at the very last moment.

⁵⁴ UNDP, UNICEF, WFP, UNHCR, Joint Action Plan for a Community Based Recovery and Restoration of Social Services in Liberia, 2006 – 2007, P. 7-8

⁵⁶ UNDP, UNICEF, WFP, UNHCR, Joint Action Plan for a Community Based Recovery and Restoration of Social Services in Liberia, 2006 – 2007, P. 8-9

⁵⁷ UN CAP 2006.

⁵⁸ Republic of Liberia, *Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy*, June 2006, P.34

⁵⁹ Government of Liberia, *150-day Action Plan, A Working Document for a New Liberia*, P.3

To that extent, efforts towards the improvement of health facilities and services should be sustained in return areas. In particular, the Joint Action Plan should be implemented in this field by the concerned agencies (UNICEF, UNDP, WFP and UNHCR)⁶⁰. The Liberian government, for its part, should give an account of the implementation of its promises made in the 150-day Action Plan to *“rehabilitate 39 clinics and 4 community health facilities around the country”*, as well as *“to provide 5000 bed nets in malaria endemic communities and medicines for 300 new cases of tuberculosis”*⁶¹.

Also of concern is the rise in the number of tuberculosis cases, which may indicate an increase in HIV infections, particularly as a result of the massive population movement over the past year. The prevalence of AIDS today in Liberia is estimated to be around 8.2%⁶². More funds for HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment are needed consequently. However, concerns have been recently expressed by the National Programme to fight AIDS (NACP) in Liberia about the renewal of the 7.6 million USD grant from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria⁶³. The international community should be aware of the rise of HIV infections in Liberia since the end of the civil war and the lack of adequate infrastructure to treat the illness.

Lastly, there is a lack of information related to family planning. The increase of HIV cases, as well as the high rate of child and maternal mortality, makes information about family planning all the more necessary. When interviewed, older women were more reluctant to family planning than younger women. However, those open to the practice, in many cases, were not informed about the different treatments available or the location of treatment centers. Regrettably, nothing is foreseen regarding this issue in the Joint Action Plan.

Education

There is an increased concern about education in return communities. According to teachers and principals interviewed, the massive return of IDPs and refugees had two main impacts. Firstly, it increased the need for buildings and materials. According to UN estimates⁶⁴, three-quarters of schools in Liberia were damaged during the recent conflict⁶⁵. Many schools lack benches, blackboards, textbooks, notebooks, pencils, etc., jeopardising the quality of classes that have resumed. Secondly, the presence of the returnees increased the number of students who cannot afford school fees or materials, which adds to the burden of an already under-financed system. The poverty of some of the returnee families deters them from sending their children to school. However, in the majority of return communities visited, most of the schools accept the children regardless of their ability to pay. School feeding programmes, as well school agriculture programmes, are said to encourage families to send their children to school.

As already noted, many children who returned from IDP camps in the middle of the academic year were not able to finish their grade. Teachers reported having problems with students who could not attend school regularly because of the war and with those who are now older than the traditional school age. They felt uncomfortable teaching a classroom

⁶⁰ UNDP, UNICEF, WFP, UNHCR, Joint Action Plan for a Community Based Recovery and Restoration of Social Services in Liberia, 2006 – 2007, P. 3-4

⁶¹ Government of Liberia, *150-day Action Plan, A Working Document for a New Liberia*, P.3

⁶² UN CAP 2006.

⁶³ IRIN, *“Fears about continuation of ARV programmes”*, 2 October 2006

⁶⁴ CAP 2006.

⁶⁵ As an example, there is no secondary school in whole Suehn-Mecca District (Bomi County)

full of students that included some who are already parents. In addition, teachers observed that older students learn with more difficulty than the younger ones. Special programmes are needed for this category of students. The UN estimates that over 500,000 children missed the opportunity to attend school and are now too old to be in the class they are expected to rejoin⁶⁶. To this extent, the Accelerated Learning Programmes should be extended in Liberia.



A community school in Lofa

Another matter of concern is female educational enrolment in Liberia. According to the UN, only 27% of girls who enrol in Grade One complete Grade Five⁶⁷. Two main reasons are put forward by teachers and principals, as well as by community members, to explain this phenomenon. Firstly, girls are subjected to early marriages and consequently early pregnancies. In a country struggling with poverty, arranged marriage of teenage girls is still a practice, which allows poor families to earn some money. Secondly, girls begin working at younger ages than boys. The money they earn is often used to pay their brothers' school fees.

Women in Liberia are therefore less educated than men⁶⁸. They are under-represented among principals and teachers throughout the country. This has an impact on education, in particular regarding sexual and gender-based issues. In return communities, women are generally aware that they are less educated than men. Their experience in camps, where humanitarian organisations encouraged school enrolment and offered free classes, taught them the importance of education. Many of them asked for adult literacy programmes. They particularly recommend developing such programmes in the evening after their domestic responsibilities have been met.

The lack of qualified teachers is also of concern. The UN estimates that only 20% of teachers in public primary schools are properly qualified⁶⁹, resulting in a situation that cannot guarantee the quality of education in the country. Moreover, not all Liberian teachers are on the government payroll. Those who are on the government payroll receive

⁶⁶ Idem

⁶⁷ Idem

⁶⁸ According to CAP 2006, adult literacy rate in Liberia is estimated at 37% (male 50% and female 24%)

⁶⁹ CAP 2006.

a salary of 17 USD per month but are only paid on an irregular basis. The Liberian National Budget for 2006, adopted last August, provides for a pay raise to 30 USD per month for civil servants. This only brought them to the threshold of the World Bank's poverty indicator of 1 USD per day. Such low salaries discourage educated people from becoming teachers. These poor salaries increase as well the risk of sexual exploitation of students by teachers, a phenomenon reported to be already widespread in Liberia⁷⁰.

Assistance Received and Local Initiatives

Humanitarian organisations carried out many project assessments in areas of return and have started implementing activities. However, returnees sometimes complain about a lack of follow-up in the running of activities. Communities also felt left out of the development of projects. Both issues are connected. Lack of community involvement is often indicative of poor follow-up. In some communities visited, for example, local residents do not use the brand new latrines built by NGOs because the community does not consider the latrines as their property. This may be due to both a lack of consultation with the local community and the fact that the NGO employed outside workers who were not local residents.

Agriculture is the main area in which community projects are developed. These projects, in most cases, are supported by NGOs. There are very few local initiatives. This is mainly due to the lack of means but also to a certain adaptation by the formerly displaced to depending on assistance from humanitarian organisations.

Last but not least, more efforts should be made to assist vulnerable persons. Projects that would benefit them are numerous, especially those targeting single mothers: from shelter reconstruction to agriculture, as well as income-generating activities to allow them to sustain their families. This situation will require greater coordination between humanitarian organisations that are already providing assistance to vulnerable people.

(2) Security and Protection

Security

In general, the security situation is said to be fine and to have improved especially since people's return to local communities. Criminal matters are referred to government institutions while domestic issues are resolved within the community. Each community has its own regulations and every infringement is punished according to a pre-established system of penalties, including community work or fines.

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

Regarding sexual and gender-based violence, very few cases of rape were reported by the returnees interviewed. They said they have referred cases to government authorities, in accordance with the new Rape Law adopted in December 2005⁷¹. The diminution of rape cases in return communities compared to the situation in IDP camps is mainly due to the fact that local community members are inter-related. Social control is more important in the communities of the interior, where people know each other. Yet some cases of rape are said to be resolved through settlement between the perpetrator and the family of the victim.

⁷⁰ See Save the Children UK's report: *From Camp to community: Liberia study on exploitation of children*, April 2006.

⁷¹ Before the adoption of this Amendment to the Rape Law, only gang rape cases were punished in Liberia.

Domestic violence is the most widely reported kind of sexual abuse in return communities. This is a sensitive issue. Women are usually reluctant to speak out about it. If they do report such violence, especially to the police, they fear that their husbands will be taken away from the family to be imprisoned. Children in interviews spoke about their parents regularly fighting at home. In most cases, people interviewed justify such behaviours by stress and post-war trauma. Food shortages were cited as well as being an incessant source of disputes between husbands and wives. Moreover, in counties with an unemployment rate between 80 and 85%,—which affects men in the first place, women end up sustaining their families through gardening, odd jobs or running small businesses. In some communities, men accept this situation with difficulty. Some even say that they feel “challenged” by women, a feeling that may explain the rise of domestic abuses.



Women cultivating rice in Kpakamai (Lofa)

Domestic violence cases are dealt with at the community level, being referred to the town chief and the assembly of elders. It is punished by a system of fines. Nevertheless, consciousness-raising programmes are much needed in return communities to make residents more aware of the issue. Such programmes should especially be developed at school, even though the lack of women teachers may jeopardize their success.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING THE LIBERIAN IDP RETURN PROCESS

A. About IDPs Remaining on the Sites of the Former Camp

Develop Agriculture Projects

Agriculture projects should be developed at the former camp sites in order to sustain local communities and remaining IDPs, both of whom are vulnerable to food insecurity.

Through positive interaction and cooperation, these projects may also contribute to the local integration of remaining IDPs. They may also encourage the development of a sense of initiative and responsibility for both local communities and remaining IDPs.

UNHCR should be particularly cautious of this when implementing the recommendations made in its camp assessment report in order to restore the environment on the sites of the former camps⁷².

Assist Vulnerable People

Regarding “eligible” vulnerable persons that UNHCR committed to repatriate, the UN agency dedicated to “*advocate for the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, and the Ministry of Gender to take the lead in addressing the needs of persons with special needs*”⁷³.

While the Liberian government has the primary responsibility in addressing the needs of its people in normal circumstances, the particular urgency of this situation requires a more rapid response. As the lead agency of the “protection cluster”, UNHCR should take the initiative to address the vulnerable population’s needs, including shelter, food and medical assistance, instead of relying on Liberian authorities, who struggle with funding.

The “ineligible” vulnerable people remaining on the sites of the former camps also need assistance. There is no recommendation in the UNHCR camp assessment report to address the needs of this population. The “protection cluster” should however deal with their situation. In particular, “ineligible” vulnerable people, like the “eligible”, should benefit from shelter programmes, in order to improve their poor living conditions.

Conflict Resolution

Land disputes as well as other conflicts between the IDPs remaining on the sites of the camps and local communities may emerge as the former IDPs will not come back home remaining. Mechanisms should be developed to address such conflict and find solutions. The Liberian Government should work on it with the help of UNHCR.

To that extent, the recommendation to “*support the Government and community to mediate between camp population and landlord/local community in locations where there is potential for tensions to arise or where there are prospects for persons with special needs to be evicted*”⁷⁴, made by UNHCR in its camp assessment report, remains too vague.

⁷² *Idem*, Recommendation 7.13 to 7.29

⁷³ *Idem*, Recommendation 7.6

⁷⁴ UNHCR, *Liberia IDP Camp Closure Assessment Report*, June 2006, Recommendation 7.9

UNHCR should actively advocate for encouraging the Liberian Government to address this issue. The Government should lead an awareness-raising campaign to encourage local communities to promote resolutions to the land conflicts between the remaining IDPs and landowners or themselves. Financial support for such agreements may be necessary, requiring the participation of the international community.

B. About Returnees

Ensure Food Security

As it remains the main matter of concern in regions of return, efforts should focus on improving food security.

Existing seeds and farming tool distribution programmes should be extended until the country is at the minimum level of food reliability. Organisations involved in this field should monitor carefully their programmes in order to avoid seeds being distributed too late, once the planting season has passed.

Seed and farming tool distribution programmes should also be paired up as much as possible with agricultural vocational training in order to encourage people to invest in agriculture activities as well as to empower them to run such activities. Agricultural vocational training projects are particularly welcome in the regions where agriculture was not well developed before the war.

Invest in Education

1. Free Education for All

According to the Education For All (EFA) objectives, launched by the Liberian Government in 2005, all children should “*have access to and complete free and compulsory education of good quality*” by 2015. The implementation of this goal should be carefully monitored. In particular, the Liberian Government should be encouraged to set up a taxation system which will facilitate the achievement of the EFA objectives.

However, before the Government is able to financially support every school in the country, a clear policy should be defined by the Ministry of Education to set what fees can be charged in public, community and private schools in order to avoid disparities between schools and abuses by school boards.

2. School Feeding and Agriculture Programmes

School feeding and agriculture programmes should be developed in return areas to encourage families to send children to school, as well as to sustain teachers that are irregularly paid, when they are paid.

However, when implementing such programmes, there is always the risk that children go to school only the day when the food distribution takes place or that, in case of take-home rations, they share this ration with members of their family or sell the rations to earn some incomes. In addition, when the programme stops, children may drop out of school⁷⁵.

⁷⁵ All these drawbacks of emergency school feeding programmes are pointed out in: UNESCO, *Guidebook for Planning Education in Emergencies and Reconstruction*, 2006

To avoid these risks when developing school feeding programmes, take-home rations should be avoided. The food should be cooked, distributed and eaten in school. Moreover, such programmes should be closely monitored to check school attendance and how the food is distributed. In particular, it should be verified that teachers do not charge the students for food, a practice that has occurred in some communities. Finally, complementary activities should be developed and an exit strategy should be planned to fill the void when the food aid ceases.

To that extent, school agriculture programmes may be good complementary activities. However, attention should be paid to involve Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) or local communities in the implementation of such programmes in order to avoid students being used for their manual labour in schools rather than being taught. The engagement taken by the Liberian Government in the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy to “*develop accelerated agricultural training programmes for youth*”⁷⁶ is particularly welcome and should be implemented.

3. School Curriculum

The new school curriculum should integrate life skills courses in order to raise children’s awareness of sensitive issues. In particular, life skills courses should include HIV/AIDS awareness-raising to work on the prevention of the disease among young people. To that extent, the engagement taken by the Liberian Government in the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy to “*integrate HIV/AIDS prevention in the Teacher training Colleges as well as school curriculum*”⁷⁷ should be implemented.

More generally, courses on sexuality and family planning should also be included. Courses on sexuality would be a means by which to raise children’s awareness on SGBV, such as rape, sexual exploitation and female genital mutilation.

4. Girl Education and Adult Literacy

Particular attention should be paid to educating girls and women in return communities.

Support should be given to the “National Policy on Girls Education” launched in April 2006 and aimed at providing free and compulsory primary education, reducing secondary school fees by 50 per cent, and offering counselling and small-scale scholarships for girls, as well as recruiting more female teachers

Moreover, adult literacy programmes for women should be encouraged and developed in return communities. Courses should be organised on the evening, a time where women are free and willing to attend such programmes. To that extent, the engagement taken by the Liberian Government to develop “*adult education programmes targeting women and men, girls and boys (especially those who are over-age)*”⁷⁸ should be implemented.

However, if literacy skills are to be consolidated into literate habits, much depends on the creation of a literate environment and no literacy programme can be fully effective unless clear attempts are made to back it up with strategies to create this environment. To this

⁷⁶ Republic of Liberia, *Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy*, June 2006, P.39

⁷⁷ Republic of Liberia, *Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy*, June 2006, P.40

⁷⁸ Republic of Liberia, *Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy*, June 2006, P.44

extent, along with adult literacy programmes attempts must be made to promote and distribute written materials within communities such as the establishment of community libraries.

Moreover, literacy programmes may open the door to other beneficial programmes such as health and hygiene classes, AIDS awareness, promotion of the rights of women, etc. For example, female genital mutilation, which is still a widespread practice in rural Liberia, may be addressed during the literacy classes, benefiting from the presence of women and men in a forum different from traditional community meetings.

5. Teacher Training

Teacher training programmes should be developed in order to up-grade teachers' knowledge to the minimum level required to teach. Efforts made by the Liberian Ministry of Education in that sense should be particularly supported, especially to rehabilitate the Teacher Training Centres and re-launch the one-year course for B and C certificate.

This last measure is essential. However, waiting until it is effective, the 3-month training programme sponsored by UNICEF⁷⁹ should be extended for at least one more year with the approval of the Liberian Government.

Moreover, teachers should be put on the government payroll. Such a measure is particularly needed in case of teachers enrolling in training courses. The beneficiaries of such training programmes, those who are not on the payroll, may stop teaching if they find a better paying job. The benefit of the training would be lost in that case.

For this, the Education budget of the Liberian Government should be increased step by step. The 7% allocated to education in the 2006 budget is not enough to face the various challenges regarding education in Liberia.

Vulnerable People

Efforts towards vulnerable people in return communities should be enhanced. In particular, shelter programmes should be extended.

Single women who found themselves making up the majority in many return communities should be of particular focus. Most importantly, awareness-raising programmes on domestic violence should be developed in return communities as women are vulnerable to that kind of violence.

⁷⁹ 550 teachers benefited from this programme in 2006.

VI. LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE LIBERIAN RETURN PROCESS

A. Organisation of the Process

(1) The Registration Process

As previously mentioned, two registration processes were conducted in IDP camps following the signature of the Accra Peace Agreement in August 2003. The first one was conducted between September 2003 and February 2004 by the management teams of the various camps as IDPs were arriving mainly from Monrovia where they took refuge during the last phase of the war. During this first exercise IDPs were registered in the WFP log for food distribution. When reports circulated that IDPs had been left out of this first exercise, a second one, known as “Consolidation of IDP Camps”, was conducted in August 2004 by LRRRC, WFP and implementing partners. In this second registration process, IDP shelters were used as the basis of the population count. However, as already pointed out, this second exercise was conducted at a poor time, when shelters were damaged by heavy rains. Therefore, many of the IDP huts were disqualified from the WFP log, having been classified as “damaged / abandoned”. This may partly explain the sizable decrease by 13,918 beneficiaries recorded at the exercise’s completion⁸⁰.



A damaged house in Blamasseh camp (Montserrat County)

Unfortunately this registration had an unintended negative impact upon the return process. Because the WFP feeding log was later used as a baseline for repatriation, under the assumption that all the IDPs willing to return would be recorded on this log, thousands of IDPs were excluded from return assistance. In this way, the Liberian return process suffered from the lack of a specific registration procedure for interested returnees.

Tracing is another way in which the absence of a specific registration procedure hampered the return process. Tracing, when aid agencies monitor displaced people’s transition to their home communities, is essential for delivering follow-up assistance to newly-settled populations struggling to get on their feet. Tracing depends on accurate information about where IDPs intend to return. However, during the two camp registration exercises, some IDPs provided the name of the place they had just come from prior to moving to the camps

⁸⁰ UNHCR Liberia, *IDP Camp Closure Assessment Report*, June 2006, P. 51

rather than identifying their genuine place of origin⁸¹. Other people chose not to return to their indicated place of origin preferring to go elsewhere, a right to which IDPs are entitled. Thus the ability to effectively trace returnees was lessened, which can be seen in some returnees' experience with the second food ration.

The return process called for two general distributions of food rations, one upon leaving for home and a second two months later. While many people interviewed did receive their second food ration despite the sometimes inaccurate information on the registration lists, some returnees did not. Many explained that the distribution centres they were assigned to were too far from the place to which they returned.

Another impact of poor tracing lists is the inability to accompany vulnerable returnees to their home communities. With a wide range of needs and often few resources to rely upon, vulnerable people deserve special attention from governments and aid agencies in order to ensure a successful return. In the case of Liberian IDPs, a specific registration procedure would have improved the quality of the tracing lists and thus the assistance provided to vulnerable returnees.



A vulnerable returnee benefiting from JRS shelter project in Lofa County

(2) Coordination Between Humanitarian Organisations

The Liberian IDP return process also suffered from the lack of clearly defined roles between aid agencies. Within Liberia are numerous agencies offering to work for the protection of IDPs, the UN agencies being among the first. After recognising the need to coordinate the response to the IDP crisis, the international community adopted the *collaborative approach* in the early 2000s. Currently the Emergency Relief Coordinator, who heads the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), is responsible to lead this approach.

⁸¹ Action Contre la Faim (ACF), *Liberia – Halfway through the Return Process*, June 2006, P. 11.

The Collaborative Approach

From the beginning however, the collaborative approach was not accepted by all stakeholders. As pointed out in a recent UNHCR study on forced displacement in Africa⁸², *“The system was decided by default. Neither the political will nor the resources existed to create a new agency to address the needs of the internally displaced. Such a new entity, it was feared, would duplicate the work of other agencies and almost certainly meet with opposition from governments that object to international involvement with their displaced population. A second, frequently suggested option – the enlargement of UNHCR’s mandate to enable it to assume the responsibility – was also rejected. The scale of the problem, it was agreed, was too large for one agency. Even the “lead agency” option, in which one agency assumes the main role in the field was largely sidelined by the collaborative approach, which substituted coordination by the Emergency Relief Coordinator at headquarters and by Resident/Humanitarian Coordinators in the field.”*

In Liberia, until March 2004, UNHCR held the “lead agency” role to direct the IDP relief effort in conjunction with other humanitarian agencies (WFP, UNICEF, NGOs, ICRC, etc). This framework, however, was changed to embrace the collaborative approach after UNHCR encountered resource problems that left it unable to coordinate the relief effort alone. OCHA then assumed the lead role. It developed a coordination scheme through the nation-wide IDP Committee and the IDP Camp Management Forum, chaired jointly with LRRRC.

In addition, in February 2004 the international community and the NTGL adopted the Results-Focused Transition Framework (RFTF), in order to lead the country to national elections in October 2005. As part of that plan, the Minister of Internal Affairs and the UN Humanitarian Coordinator approved the establishment of a Joint Planning Team (JPT) made up of relevant UN agencies, LRRRC, NGOs, and ICRC, in order to plan the IDP return.

However, in June 2004 NGOs started to criticise this system. They pointed out, among other things, that the dual function of the Humanitarian Coordinator as Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General called into question his *“ability to fulfil his role on behalf of the wider humanitarian community”*⁸³. As for the government, the NTGL’s capacity limitations jeopardised its ability to properly lead the implementation of the RFTF. The IDP-related planning suffered as a result.

Additionally, in October 2004, the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) decided to replace senior staff involved in the JPT with people who had almost no experience of the recent Liberian IDP context. Lastly, in early 2005, the former coordination structures were replaced by a new IDP Consultative Forum on Return (ICF), highly criticised by NGOs as a closed forum gathering only UN agencies, LRRRC, donors and one international NGO.

This lack of effective coordination and the abolition of IDP camp coordination open fora resulted in what a Forced Migration Review article characterised as *“some camps being underserved while duplication and overlap occurred in others”*⁸⁴. The same article also found recurring problems in the provision of essential goods and services in the camps. They

⁸² UNHCR, Jeff Crisp, Research Paper N°126, *Forced displacement in Africa: dimensions, difficulties and policy directions*, July 2006.

⁸³ International Council of Voluntary Agencies, *The Humanitarian Response in Liberia: Some Observations by the ICVA Coordinator*, 17 June 2004.

⁸⁴ Anne Davies and Magnus Wolfe Murray, *Implementation of the Collaborative Response in Liberia*, Forced Migration Review, October 2005.

provided the example of “one UN agency [who] repeatedly promised to provide sufficient non-food items (NFIs) to IDPs but, when unable to do so, declared that it could not be held accountable for gaps and delays”. The authors commented, “Abnegation of responsibility is possible because there is no formal responsibility apportioned to agencies under the Collaborative Response, and thus no accountability when agencies renege on their promises. Similarly, inability to provide sufficient NFIs for return packages has led to delays in return operations.”⁸⁵

Moreover, the restricted nature of the ICF meant that policies could be adopted without consulting the majority of stakeholders delivering assistance to IDP camps. For example, in 2004, all the stakeholders agreed in the JPT that return packages would be provided in UNHCR-constructed transit centres. This decision was reversed, however, in 2005 by the new ICF forum, which decided to provide return packages in the camps prior to departure, against the will and interest of IDPs.

Another example of the deficiencies of the collaborative approach is, as already mentioned, how the transportation of IDPs was organised in Liberia.

The Cluster Approach

Having taken into account all the criticisms about the collaborative approach, which not only came from the experience in Liberia but also from other fields of operation, including Darfur, OCHA launched an urgent Humanitarian Response Review (HRR) in December 2004 in order to “upgrade” the humanitarian assistance system. In this frame, a new model of collaboration, known as the *cluster approach*, was introduced. The idea behind this was to clarify the roles and responsibilities granted to each UN agency. UNHCR acts therefore as *cluster lead* regarding protection, shelter and camp coordination. Nutrition, water and sanitation activities are now the primary responsibility of UNICEF, health is under the responsibility of WHO, and WFP assumes the responsibility for logistics. Finally, UNDP is in charge of the “early recovery” cluster.

Liberia, as well as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, and Somalia, were chosen as test countries for the implementation of the cluster approach. From now on, however, noted Jeff Crisp, author of UNHCR’s forced displacement study, “the new arrangements introduced as a result of the HRR will not by themselves affect the fundamental factors that have made it so difficult to provide effective protection and assistance in situations of internal displacement: limited funding, poor access to the populations concerned, lack of security for humanitarian personnel, and limited cooperation from the governments of countries with large IDP populations.”⁸⁶

In a return context like Liberia, the new cluster approach will hopefully improve coordination between agencies for the rebuilding of return communities. However, though the introduction of the cluster approach may have improved the coordination between UN agencies, when it comes to coordination between UN and NGOs, it remains a UN-led process, in which NGOs may be consulted but have few chances to influence the decision-making. On the contrary, the cluster approach is a way for UN to subordinate humanitarian action to its political agenda. As an example, the return of IDPs, which was to be organised by the UN system, was slow and regularly delayed until the moment it became the political priority of UNMIL because everybody had to go home in time for the

⁸⁵ Idem

⁸⁶ UNHCR, Jeff Crisp, Research Paper N°126, *Forced displacement in Africa: dimensions, difficulties and policy directions*, July 2006.

elections. Suddenly the question became so urgent that it had to be done in the middle of the rainy season, when shelters at destinations were not ready and when it was already too late for farmers to plant.

As another example, NGOs made it clear that the pre-existing protection group worked well and that there was no need for an additional protection cluster. But they ended up acquiescing, and were forced to give up the rotating chair. Since January 2006, UNHCR is chairing the Protection Core Group. Since then, most of the work consisted in setting up terms of reference and membership for the different sub-clusters: rule of law, IDP return and reintegration, child protection, SGBV, and SEA.

B. The Assistance Received by IDPs

(1) Return Package and Transportation Assistance

As already pointed out in this report, the lack of items necessary for reintegration in return areas, such as seeds and farming tools, deterred some IDPs from going back home and was a factor in drawing back to the camps some of those who had left. Without seeds and farming tools, reintegration in rural areas is not sustainable. In its Regional Multi-Year Operation Plan for the Repatriation and Reintegration of Liberian Refugees and IDPs for the years 2004-2007, UNHCR foresaw the need to provide IDPs returning home with *“a package containing food, non-food items and agriculture seed and tools”*⁸⁷. However, one of the main criticisms expressed by returnees about the way in which the return process was organised was the absence of these agricultural necessities. Without these items, returnees had to continue their reliance on humanitarian organisations since they had no other means of becoming self-sufficient. Some IDPs realised the implications of this situation and so did not bother to leave the camps. Some of the returnees, finding themselves in a difficult situation back home, preferred to return to the site of the former camps where they still had connections and opportunities to do small jobs to at least make ends meet.

Transportation assistance presented another obstacle for prospective returnees. IDPs complained about the small amount of transportation assistance received, after IOM stopped driving people back home. As mentioned, the amount of this assistance was calculated without taking into account the rise of transportation costs during the rainy season, even though most IDPs returned during this season. Additionally, transportation assistance did not take into account the fact that IDPs sometimes had many belongings with them. Some returnees were forced to leave a part of their belongings behind in the camps. Moreover, as mentioned, the majority of IDPs were obliged to do small jobs, and even sometimes to sell a part of the return package, in order to gather the amount of money necessary to go back home. Others could not reach home at all. They decided to resettle at the site of the former camps or in other parts of the country.

(2) The Local Communities Hosting IDP Camps

When asked if they benefited from humanitarian organisations' assistance, local communities neighbouring the former IDP camps reported that they felt forgotten by NGOs. However, when asked if they were able to benefit from NGO services offered in IDP camps, they acknowledged that the presence of IDPs brought services such as clinics and schools, which were open to them as well. This shows the ambiguous relationship that

⁸⁷ UNHCR, Regional Multi-Year Operation Plan for the Repatriation and Reintegration of Liberian Refugees and IDPs (2004-2007), P. 28

local communities may have had with IDPs. Although they made efforts to host thousands of them, local communities tend to consider that they did not receive the same attention as IDPs. This feeling is increased by the fact that most humanitarian organisations have since left following the closing of the camps. Host communities feel all the more forgotten since their needs are the same as those in return communities, namely food, health, shelter, water and sanitation, and education.



Water installation abandoned in Salala camp

This last point highlights the absence of transitional phases in the exit strategies of most humanitarian organisations. Humanitarian organisations concentrate their efforts in regions of return (Lofa, Gporlu, Mimba, Bomi Counties), leaving behind areas that have hosted IDP camps. The feeling of injustice that consequently spread among the population may hamper the integration of IDPs looking to resettle in or around the former camps.

C. Skills Training and Education

(1) Skills training

Interviewed returnees unanimously acknowledged the benefit of the skills training they received in IDP camps. This was in most cases the first aspect that returnees mentioned when asked about their IDP camp experience. According to the recent UNHCR assessment exercise at the sites of the former camps, most of the remaining IDPs are unskilled⁸⁸. This may suggest that helping IDPs to develop skills encourages them to go back home. If verified, skills training could be seen to directly contribute to the success of the return process.

Some returnees however complained that they could not put their skills into practice as the materials they received at the end of the training were not sufficient by themselves to start any activity. In addition, there are some IDPs who sold the materials they received in order to make ends meet. On the contrary, other IDPs managed to launch small businesses with their items. Some started businesses like baking or soap-making when they were still in the camps, in the hope of earning money for their resettlement.

⁸⁸ UNHCR Liberia, *IDP Camp Closure Assessment Report*, June 2006, P. 10.

(2) Education

Displacement gave IDPs important educational opportunities. When they were in camps, many families could send their children to aid agency-supported schools since they were free. Some children could progress through all the school grades, something they could not have imagined before the war due to their families' lack of means. As already mentioned, some families returned to their communities of origin without their older children, leaving them behind in the former camps to complete their schooling.



School in Salala camp

Adult IDPs also benefited from educational opportunities. Many were able to attend adult literacy programmes. Now that returnees are back in their communities of origin, they are asking for such literacy programmes.

(3) Peace-Building and Education

Most returnees acknowledged that displacement taught them how to interact with other communities and ethnic groups. Some of them say that the experience of displacement opened their mind about other people's way of life. They had the opportunity to realise that customs in other parts of the country, although different, hold some similarities to their own customs. Some returnees even recognised that they learned new techniques and basic skills (how to use bamboo in building their shelter, how to improve agriculture or fishing, etc.) from other ethnic groups. In general, returnees were happy to have made friends from other parts of their county and even from other parts of the country.

All these elements show how the experience of displacement may contribute to peace-building in a post-war country. At the very least, life in the camps gave IDPs the opportunity to interact with people from other parts of the country. This strengthened their feeling of belonging to one nation, while challenging the preconceived notions they may have held in regards to other ethnic or cultural groups.

D. Women

War and displacement changed the role of women in Liberian society. As many found themselves without their husbands, women were forced to learn how to take care of their families by themselves. They may also have acquired new skills through camp training or educational programmes and, as previously mentioned, may have learned how to organise themselves to develop common initiatives. Having returned to their communities of origin, they have more responsibilities, performing activities such as farming that they did not used to do before the war. In many cases, it is the small businesses they run that sustain their families.

However, even though they have more responsibilities, women remain underrepresented in the local decision-making process. While in some local communities there is a *chair-lady*, a woman who possesses a voice of authority, often she is only a spokesperson for the town chief, echoing his decisions and opinions instead of defending women's interests. Cases of a woman being town chief are very rare.

Even though single mothers may now be heads of households or women the primary bread-winners for a family, rural society remains male-dominated. Men still assume positions of authority and are responsible for decisions affecting the community. However, the shift in the role of women has created tensions in many communities. The presence of domestic violence may be one sign of such tension, if men feel their traditional authority is challenged by the new social prominence of women. This situation may result in greater vulnerability for women who have returned.

In Liberia, however, very few projects devoted to women are developed in return communities. Women express a great interest in agriculture but noted their difficulty in obtaining farm seed and tools. Similarly, those who participated in skills training courses in IDP camps often cannot practice the trades they learned because of a lack of money and materials. Efforts should be made to offer programmes addressing these needs such as development grants or start-up loans.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS IN VIEW OF FUTURE IDP RETURN PROCESSES

A Specific Registration Exercise

A specific registration exercise should be conducted before starting the IDP return process. This would facilitate the tracing of returnees as well as improve the quality of the assistance provided in return communities.

Improve the Coordination of Humanitarian Organisations

The cluster approach should improve the partnership between UN agencies and NGOs in order to allow the latter to be fully integrated and to participate in the process.

Accountability mechanisms should also be put in place in order to measure the progress made by the introduction of the cluster approach. To that extent, OCHA should evaluate how the cluster approach improved the IDP return process in Liberia.

Reintegration Packages and Repatriation of IDPs

The various criticisms expressed by IDPs show the importance of including “reintegration items”, either farming items or a small incentive, in their return package.

However, to minimise the ever present risk that items will be sold or stolen before reaching return areas, IDPs, like refugees, should be transported back home and given their return package in transit centres.

Include Hosting Communities among Beneficiaries

Humanitarian organisations, while operating in IDP camps, should also include local community residents among their beneficiaries to the greatest extent possible. They should try as well to hire local community members as local staff. In both cases, this may help IDPs integrate into the surrounding community should they choose to stay.

Most of all, in cases where local communities have suffered the effects of war, they should benefit from the same efforts of reconstruction as return areas.

Vocational Training

Vocational training beneficiaries should be encouraged to put into practice their skills with the materials they receive and to avoid that they sell these materials.

One solution to avoid such a risk is to pair up skills training with management training in order to teach beneficiaries how to launch and manage small businesses with the materials they receive.

Another possibility would be to hand out materials at the end of the training period only after beneficiaries present a proposal for an income-generating project that puts their new skills into practice. An incentive may also be included for those who implement their projects as soon as possible.

This last suggestion would seem particularly appropriate for easy-to-implement skills, such as baking and soap-making. In these fields, beneficiaries should be encouraged to start income-generating activities while in the camps in order to save money for their reintegration into return communities.

VIII. ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: Maps

Map of Liberia



UN Humanitarian Information Centre (HIC)

Location of the former IDP camps



UNHCR

ANNEX 2: List of the Former IDP Camps and Return Communities visited

Former IDP Camps Visited

<i>Name of the Camp</i>	<i>Location</i>
Maimu III	Bong County – Salala District
Salala + Salala community	Bong County – Salala District
Maimu I et II	Bong County – Salala District
Tumutu	Bong County – Salala District
E.J Yancee + Totota and New Totota communities + Baysah Farm	Bong County – Salala District
Konola Town	Margibi County – Kakata District
Horton Farm	Margibi County – Kakata District
Kingsville	Montserrado County – Todee District
Newland	Montserrado County – Todee District
Plumkor	Montserrado County – St Paul River District
Wilson + Wilson local community	Montserrado County – St Paul River District
Ricks + Ricks local community	Montserrado County – St Paul River District
Blamacee + Blamacee local community	Montserrado County – St Paul River District
Perry	Montserrado County – St Paul River District
Jah Tondo	Montserrado County – St Paul River District

Return Communities

<i>Name of the Community</i>	<i>Location</i>
Kolahun Town + Kolahun Old Town	Lofa County – Kolahun District
Vezela	Lofa County –
Betjama	Lofa County –
Yandisu	Lofa County –
Zolowo	Lofa County – Salayea District
Fissibu	Lofa County –
Konia	Lofa County – Zorzor District
Johny's Town	Lofa County – Voinjama District
Zawordemai	Lofa County – Voinjama District
Kosemai	Lofa County –
Lewalezu	Lofa County –
Jomata	Lofa County – Foya District
Porluma	Lofa County – Foya District
Koidnou	Lofa County – Foya District
Boi	Lofa County – Zorzor District
David Selmah-Ta Town	Lofa County – Voinjama District
Suehn	Bomi County – Suehn Mecca District
Zwaih	Bomi County – Suehn Mecca District
Gbao	Bomi County – Suehn Mecca District

Gbao # 2	Bomi County – Suehn Mecca District
James Bryant	Bomi County – Suehn Mecca District
Hill Town	Bomi County – Suehn Mecca District
Bumbulah	Bomi County – Suehn Mecca District
Moila	Bomi County – Suehn Mecca District
Saint Ngondwe	Bomi County – Suehn Mecca District
Maizen	Bomi County – Suehn Mecca District
Golodee Gayla	Bomi County – Klay District
Guie	Bomi County – Klay District
Buor	Bomi County – Klay District

ANNEX 3: Questionnaires Used to Conduct the Evaluation

A. Questionnaire for remaining IDPs at the site of the former camps

1. General Information

- 1.1 What is the proportion of male and female inhabitants? 1.4 Why? (If females are the majority, does it mean that the male heads of family have returned, leaving their family behind?)
- 1.2 Are there vulnerable persons? 1.6 What is the most frequent category of vulnerability you have seen?
- 1.3 Who is taking care of them? (Family members or local community?)

2. Appreciation of the return process by IDPs

- 2.1 When the government closed the camps last April, some of the displaced left. What do you think about the return process?
- 2.2 How was it organised? 2.3 Have you or other IDPs been involved somehow in this process?
- 2.3 Did you get information about the situation in your region of origin?
- 2.4 How did you get this information? 2.8 By whom?
- 2.5 What did the return package consist of? 2.12 What would you have liked to have seen added to this package?
- 2.6 Who benefited from the distribution?
- 2.7 Do you know if there are some IDPs who have come back to the camp after being assisted to return?

3. Appreciation of the closure of camps by IDPs

- 3.1 Do you think that the closure of the camps was good or bad news? Why?
- 3.2 How did the local community react to the closure of the camp?

4. Reasons to stay

- 4.1 What made you remain in the camp? (Family ties? Vulnerable persons in your family? Opportunities in the area of the camp?)
- 4.2 Would you return if you were proposed a place of return other than your community of origin? 4.9 Why?
- 4.3 How do you make your living in the former camp?

5. Relationship with local community

- 5.1 Do you feel that you are taken into account by the local community? 5.3 How?
- 5.2 Do some of you take part in community meetings?
- 5.3 What kind of support do you get from the local community?
- 5.4 How do you contribute to community life?
- 5.5 Do you have the feeling that the closure of the camps affected your relationship with the local community? 5.8 In which ways?

6. Relationship with landowners

- 6.1 What is your relationship with the landowner of the camp? 6.2 Does he want you to leave?

7. Relationship with humanitarian organizations

- 7.1 Did the humanitarian organizations include IDPs in the running of their projects?
- 7.2 Did these organizations leave the area after the closure of the camps? 7.4 What was the impact on your daily life?
- 7.3 Are there organizations who have come to assist you after the closure of the camp? 7.6 In which areas?

8. Past and present needs

- 8.1 What are your present needs? (Food security, Shelter, Watsan, health)
- 8.2 Did these needs increase after the closure of the camps?
- 8.3 How do you cope with these needs?
- 8.4 Have you ever benefited from the cooperation of the IDP community? (examples)

9. Education

- 9.1 In case you have children, are they attending school? Where? 9.3 (age and gender)
- 9.2 Do you think they are better assisted now? 9.5 Why?

10. Security and Protection

- 10.1 Do you think security has improved (or not) since the closure of the camps? 10.3 Why?

- 10.2 There were protection cases reported in many IDP camps, especially gender violence. Have you recently heard of any such cases in your community? 10.5 How are these cases addressed?

11. Expectations

- 11.1 How do you see your future? (intend to stay or not)

B. Questionnaire for local communities/authorities at the sites of the former camps

1. General Information about IDPs

- 1.1 How many IDPs were living in the camps before they officially closed?
- 1.2 What is the approximate number of IDPs remaining at the site of the former camps?
- 1.3 Where do they come from? 1.4 Do they belong to any particular tribe?
- 1.4 What is the proportion of male and female inhabitants?
- 1.5 If females are the majority, does it mean that the male heads of family have returned, leaving their family behind?
- 1.6 Are there vulnerable persons? 1.8 What category of vulnerability do they fall into? (chronically ill, physically disabled, unaccompanied minor, single parent, single female, elder in charge of minor, unaccompanied elder, separated child, child head of household, blind, partially blind, amputee, survivor of violence, mentally disabled, deaf and mute)
- 1.7 Who is taking care of them? (Family members or the local community?)
- 1.8 Do you think that the closure of the camps was good or bad news? 1.11 Why?

2. Perception of IDPs by local communities

- 2.1 Why was the camp settled near your community?
- 2.2 What was the reaction of people in the community when the camp was settled?
- 2.3 How was the relationship between the local community and the IDPs? 2.4 And regarding displaced people belonging to other tribes than yours?
- 2.4 How do the remaining IDPs contribute to community life?
- 2.5 Do some of them take part in community meetings?

3. Perception of the return process by local communities

- 3.1 Do you expect the last IDPs to return in the near future? 3.2 Why?

3.3 What do you think should be done for them?

3.4 What do you think are the reasons why these persons have not returned to their community of origin? (Was the return package not enough? Do they fear for their security in the places of return? Do they feel a lack of opportunities for their reintegration? Etc.)

4. Perception of IDPs' needs by local communities

4.1 What do you think are the difficulties that remaining IDPs face?

4.2 How do they face these difficulties? 4.3 How does the local community help them?

5. Relationship between IDPs and landowners

5.1 What is the relationship between remaining IDPs and the landowner of the camp?

5.2 Are there landowners who accepted to host the IDPs? Under which conditions? (There are such resettlement camps in Salala, close to Maimu, Totota and E.J. Yancey).

6. Impact of the presence of humanitarian organizations (UN, INGOs and local NGOs) on community life and the relationship between these organizations and local communities

6.1 How were relations between the humanitarian organizations working in the camps and the local community? (UN, INGO's and Local NGO's)

6.2 Did the humanitarian organizations include local community members among their beneficiaries?

6.3 Are any local community members working in the humanitarian organizations' programs?

6.4 Did these organizations leave the area after the closure of the camps?

6.5 What was the impact on community life?

7. Present needs of local communities

7.1 What are your present needs?

7.1.1 Food security:

- Do members of the community benefit from a food distribution programme? If so, which members (former IDPs or other)?
- Has the community received seeds for the agricultural season? If so, who benefited from the distribution? What were the criteria of selection? Which organization organised the distribution? Was it on time?

7.1.2 Shelter:

- Today, what are the specific needs regarding shelter (tarpaulin,...)?
- Did the local community receive any help from an organization? Was there some help promised by an organization? When?

7.1.3 Watsan:

- What is the source of drinking water in the town? Has any organization installed pumps? If so, when? Are they functioning?
- Are there some latrines/toilets? If so, which organization built them? When? Are they functioning?

7.1.4 Health:

- Is there a clinic? If so, which organization is running it? If not, how far is the closest one?
- What are the needs of the clinic (medicine, water, latrines,...)?
- How many clinics are in the area? How far are they from each other?

7.2 Did these needs increase after the closure of the camps?

7.3 Are there organisations coming to develop projects? 7.4 And government authorities?

8. Education needs

8.1 Regarding Education:

- State of the school: has it been renovated? By which organization?
- How many students are there? How many male and female staff members (it is important if the proportion changed due to the remaining IDPs)?
- How many teachers are there? Are they on payroll? If there are volunteers, are they supported by the local community? How? How many male and female staff?
- What are the specific needs of the school (Watsan, food and NFI, furniture, school supplies)?

8.2 Were there many IDP children studying in community/public schools?

8.3 What was the impact of the closure of the camp on those schools?

9. Security and Protection

9.1 How is the security situation in the community?

9.2 Do you think security has improved (or not) since the closure of the camps? 9.3 Why?

9.4 There were protection cases reported in many communities hosting IDP camps, especially gender violence. Do you think these problems have increased (or not) since the closure of the camps? 9.5 Why?

9.6 How do you cope with such security and protection cases? (Do you use traditional justice or statutory justice?)

10. Conclusion: Lessons learned

10.1 How do you see the future of your community?

10.2 If you were asked again to host a new camp in your community, what would you decide? 10.3 Why?

C. Questionnaire for returnees

1. General Information about the returnee

- 1.1 How long have you been in the camp?
- 1.2 When did you arrive in this community?
- 1.3 Did you have family in the camp? What kind of relatives? Have they returned? If not, why?
- 1.4 Are there vulnerable people in your family? If there are, did you leave with them?
- 1.5 Did you return to your community of origin? If not, why? If yes, did you have other possibilities of return?

2. Appreciation of the return process

- 2.1 Why did you choose to return? What encouraged you to come back?
- 2.2 Did you receive any information about your place of return?
 - How did you get the information?
 - Did the information you receive correspond to reality?
- 2.3 Did you receive support for your transportation? Was it enough?
- 2.4 How was the journey back home (length, security)?

3. Relationship between returnees and the community of return

- 3.1 Do you feel integrated in the community? 3.3 Why?
 - How do you contribute to the community life?(Good or bad examples/experiences)
 - Do you take part in community meetings? If not, why? Do other returnees like you take part in those kinds of meetings?
- 3.2 When you came back, did you find your land occupied? If yes, how did you cope with this problem?
 - What was the role of the community in the resolution of this problem?
 - If your land was not returned to you, did you receive any compensation? From whom?
- 3.3 Do you think relationships between people have changed compared to what it was like before you left? Why?

4. Return Assistance

- 4.1 Did the return package you received in the IDP camp help you to start your new life?

4.2 Have you received your second food resettlement package? If not, why?

4.3 What part of the package helped you most to reintegrate? Why? What was lacking?

4.4 How do you respond to those who feel that they have not benefited from the same assistance as you?

5. Needs

5.1 What are your present needs?

5.2 How do you cope with these needs?

In the case of people having benefited from skills training in IDP camps, how did they manage to put their new skills into practice?

5.3 Do you receive any assistance?

In the case of assistance from humanitarian organisations, is the community involved in the projects?

5.4 If you have children, do you face any difficulty sending them to school? Why?

Some displaced children returned in the middle of the academic year. Could they attend school and finish the academic year?

6. Security and Protection

6.1 Do you think your security has improved since you returned to your community? Why?

6.2 There were gender-based violence cases reported in some return communities. Have you heard of any cases here?

6.3 How are security and protection cases addressed in the community?

7. To conclude

7.1 Taking into account your experience, are you happy to have returned? Why?

D. Questionnaire for communities of return

1. General Information about IDPs and the local community

1.1 What is the proportion of returnees among the population? (Distinguish the registered IDP from the others)

1.2 When did most of them flee? Where? (In IDP camps? To Monrovia?)

1.3 When did people start to return? Are people still returning? How often (daily, weekly, monthly)?

- 1.4 Do you know of any IDPs who came back from the camps spontaneously, without having received any help?
- 1.5 Did the people who returned belong to the community before the war?
- 1.6 Do you know of any people who returned but then afterwards went back to the camps?
- 1.7 What is the proportion of males and females among returnees?
If males are the majority, does it mean that the heads of family have returned, leaving their family behind?
- 1.8 Are there vulnerable persons?
 - What category of vulnerability do they fall into? (chronically ill, physically disabled, unaccompanied minor, single parent, single female, elder in charge of minor, unaccompanied elder, separated child, child head of household, blind, partially blind, amputee, survivor of violence, mentally disabled, deaf and mute)
 - Who is taking care of them? (Family members or the local community?)
- 1.9 Are there ex-combatants in your community? Are they well integrated? Do they benefit from any specific assistance (ask for details)?

2. Relationship between returnees and the community of return

- 2.1 How is the relationship between IDPs and the community?
 - Do you feel any rivalries between those who were assisted and other members of the community, especially those who were displaced in Monrovia and who did not go to camps?
 - How does the community cope with the differences between assisted people and the others?
- 2.2 Are IDPs well integrated in the community life?
 - How do returnees contribute to the community life? (Good or bad examples/experiences)
 - Do some of them take part in community meetings?
- 2.3 We have heard about land tenure problems, land of IDPs being occupied by other members of the community. Do you have such problems in your community?
How does the community cope with such problems?

3. Perception of the return process and returnee needs by local communities

- 3.1 What is your feeling about the way the return process was organized? Why?
- 3.2 Have all the returnees received their second resettlement package?
 - Did they face any problems receiving this assistance?
 - Which problems were encountered? (Distance between the village and the place of distribution; mismanagement of WFP in charge of the distribution...)

4. Needs of the community of return

4.1 What are the needs of your community?

Food security:

Do members of the community benefit from a food distribution programme? If so, which members (former IDPs or others)? Has the community received seeds for the agricultural season? If so, who benefits from the distribution? What were the criteria of selection? Which organization organised the distribution? Was it on time?

Shelter:

Today, what are the specific needs regarding shelter (tarpaulin,...)? Did the local community receive any help from an organization? Was there some help promised by an organization? When?

Watsan:

What is the source of drinking water in the town? Has any organization installed pumps? If so, when? Are they functioning? Are there latrines/toilets? If so, which organization built them? When? Are they functioning?

Health:

Is there a clinic? If so, which organization is running it? If not, how far is the closest one? What are the needs of the clinic (medicine, water, latrines,...)? How many clinics are in the area? How far are they from each other?

Education:

- State of the school: has it been renovated? By which organization?
- How many students are there? How many male and female students (it is important to check if the proportion changed due to the arrival of returnees)?
- How many teachers are there? Are they on payroll? If there are volunteers, are they supported by the local community? How? How many male and female staff members?
- What are the school's specific needs (Watsan, food and NFI, furniture, school supplies, enough room)?
- What was the impact of the arrival of returnee children on the management of the school?
- Some children came back in the middle of the academic year. Could they attend school and finish the academic year?
- What about young people beyond school age? Do they benefit from any special learning programme?

4.2 Do you think that the needs of the IDPs who returned are the same as those of the community?

4.3 How does the community face these needs?

Have you developed any community initiatives in response to these needs?

4.4 Are there any humanitarian organisations coming to develop projects? And government authorities?

4.5 Is the community involved in these projects?

- Does the humanitarian organization consult the community?
- Does the project employ community residents?

4.6 Do the projects benefit the whole community or only specific groups (returnees, ex-combattants...)?

5. Security and Protection

5.1 Do you think security has improved since the IDPs returned? Why?

5.2 There were gender-based violence cases (domestic violence, rape, sexual exploitation) reported in some return communities. How about your community?

5.3 How do you cope with such security and protection cases?

6. To conclude

6.1 How do you see the future of your community?

E. Questionnaires for Women and Children in Return Communities

Women

1. Which IDP camp did you stay in?
2. When did you go to the camp?
3. When did you come back to the community?
4. Did you live here before going to the camp?
5. Did you stay in the camp with relatives or other people of the community? Did women make up a majority of the population? What about here in the community?
6. How many children do you have? Were any of them born in the camp?
7. Did they go to the school in the camp? And now? Do you have to pay school fees? How much are the fees?
8. How was life in the camp?
9. How was the experience of living with people from other counties and tribes? Did you co-operate? Did women co-operate with each other?
10. Did you receive any kind of skills training? If yes, have you been able to put it into practice in the community?
11. Did you have food-related problems in the camp? And today?
12. What encouraged you to come back?
13. How did you return (truck, car, by foot)?
14. Did you receive the return package (1st and 2nd)? Were they useful to start your life in the community?
15. How was your house when you arrived in the community?
16. Did you rebuild the house? In the case of widows and single women: did anybody help you?
17. Are there many single women with children?
18. Do women co-operate in the community?
19. Do they participate in community meetings?
20. Have women started any kind of activity together?

21. What would you like to do in the community today?
22. In your opinion, what are the main needs of the community?
23. Is there any NGO giving assistance to the community?
24. Are you married?
25. How do you manage to feed your family?
26. Are there any disabled people in your family? If any, what kind of disability? Do you receive help of any kind?
27. Are there orphans in the community? Who is taking care of them?
28. How is the relationship between men and women in the community?
29. If any kind of violence against women or children takes places, what do you do? Would you speak about it with the community?
30. How were the security conditions in the camp?
31. Do you feel safer living here? Do you think that your children are safer here than in the camp?
32. Do you think that the situation here is improving?
33. What are your worries?
34. What do you think about the future of your children?

Children

1. How was life in the camp? What did you like about living in the camp?
2. Did you go to the school there? And now?
3. What do you like about going to school? Do you like your teachers? Are they men or women?
4. What do you prefer: the camp or here?
5. How is life with your family? Do you fight with your brothers or sisters? And your parents, do they fight?
6. What do you do every day?
7. What would you like to be in the future?

ANNEX 4: Bibliography

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ANNEX 5: Acronyms

<i>Full Name</i>	<i>Acronym</i>
Action Contre la Faim	ACF
Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration	DDR
Humanitarian Coordinator	HC
IDP Consultative Forum	ICF
International Red Cross Committee	ICRC
Internally Displacement Persons	IDP
International Organisation for Migration	IOM
Joint Planning Team	JPT
Jesuit Refugee Service	JRS
Liberian Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Committee	LRRRC
Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy	LURD
Movement for Democracy in Liberia	MODEL
Non Governmental Organisation	NGO
National Transitional Government of Liberia	NTGL
Non Food Items	NFI
United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs	OCHA
Results-Focused Transitional Framework	RFTE
United Nations	UN
United Nations Development Programme	UNDP
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	UNHCR
United Nations Children's Fund	UNICEF
United Nations Mission in Liberia	UNMIL
World Food Programme	WFP

ANNEX 6: Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement

“Section V. Principles Relating to Return, Resettlement and Reintegration

Principle 28

1. Competent authorities have the primary duty and responsibility to establish conditions, as well as provide the means, which allow internally displaced persons to return voluntarily, in safety and with dignity, to their homes or places of habitual residence, or to resettle voluntarily in another part of the country. Such authorities shall endeavour to facilitate the reintegration of returned or resettled internally displaced persons.

2. Special efforts should be made to ensure the full participation of internally displaced persons in the planning and management of their return or resettlement and reintegration.

Principle 29

1. Internally displaced persons who have returned to their homes or places of habitual residence or who have resettled in another part of the country shall not be discriminated against as a result of their having been displaced. They shall have the right to participate fully and equally in public affairs at all levels and have equal access to public services.

2. Competent authorities have the duty and responsibility to assist returned and/or resettled internally displaced persons to recover, to the extent possible, their property and possessions which they left behind or were dispossessed of upon their displacement. When recovery of such property and possessions is not possible, competent authorities shall provide or assist these persons in obtaining appropriate compensation or another form of just reparation.

Principle 30

All authorities concerned shall grant and facilitate for international humanitarian organizations and other appropriate actors, in the exercise of their respective mandates, rapid and unimpeded access to internally displaced persons to assist in their return or resettlement and reintegration.”

The Guiding Principles are available on: http://www.reliefweb.int/ocha_ol/pub/idp_gp/idp.html