

COTE D'IVOIRE, GUINEA, LIBERIA, SIERRA LEONE: RELIEF, REPATRIATION AND RESETTLEMENT

16 September 1999

appeal no. 01.05/99

situation report no. 6

period covered: 1st January 1999 - 30th June 1999

Responding to developments in the region since the launch of the appeal, the Federation has issued two separate Situation Reports (or Special Reports) respectively for Guinea-Conakry and Liberia, as well as a separate Emergency Appeal (14/99) which was issued on 31 May, 1999 for Sierra Leone. This Situation Report No. 6 is intended to present a regional overview and update on the evolving situation and the corresponding programme changes which have occurred during the first half of the year in Guinea, the Ivory Coast, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. A formal budget revision for this appeal is in process.

The context

As civil war broke out once again in Sierra Leone in January 1999 and vicious fighting took place between rebel troops and government/ECOMOG forces, the hope held out by hundreds of thousands of refugees that they might soon return home, was dashed. Since the beginning of the year there has been relative peace in Liberia; however, the situation remains tense, the climate volatile and conditions extremely harsh for returnees given the almost total absence of infrastructure in place to assist them upon their return. As a result of renewed fighting in Sierra Leone, and precarious security in both Liberia and Guinea-Bissau, the refugee caseload in neighbouring Guinea Conakry has continued to swell, reaching a total of 600,000.

Given the constantly-changing and highly unpredictable environment in West Africa, the objectives described in the 1999 Emergency Appeal have been reviewed in respect to programmes in Guinea and Sierra Leone. Although needs remain considerable in Liberia, given funding constraints which continue to jeopardise programme implementation the objectives for the operations in Liberia have also been revised. As for operations in Côte d'Ivoire, a severe funding shortage has also seriously hampered progress. Separate situation reports are available for Guinea and Liberia and a new Appeal was launched for assistance in Sierra Leone.

Latest events

The peace accord for Sierra Leone signed on 7 July in Togo has the commitment of all parties to the conflict and there is hope that stability will gradually return, despite sporadic outbreaks of fighting. The humanitarian situation in the country is, however, dramatic with hundreds of thousands of displaced and homeless, severe shortages of food accompanied by high levels of malnutrition, particularly amongst the

under fives, and a widespread lack of medicines. The Federation launched an Appeal for Sierra Leone on 31 May for assistance to support the work of the National Society which has been active throughout the conflict. In Guinea, efforts towards repatriation of Liberian refugees in N'Zérékéré have not been entirely successful, given the tensions in Liberia, while in Guéckédou, huge influxes of refugees have put a strain on the both the local population and the humanitarian community. Agencies reviewed their programmes early in the year and the Red Cross Society of Guinea/Federation, in agreement with the UNHCR, has taken on increased responsibilities including social welfare activities in view of the great need for counselling, self-help initiatives, and community services. In regards to the Côte d'Ivoire, at the end of June 1999, the Federation's support of refugee assistance in the reception zone was terminated. The National Society continues to manage food and non-food distributions in collaboration with the UNHCR.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Cote d'Ivoire

Liberian Refugee Operation w

The UNHCR provides food assistance to the refugee population and distributions are managed by the Red Cross Society of Cote d'Ivoire. The Federation withdrew from the operation at the end of June due to funding constraints, and UNHCR has indicated that the programme will be discontinued in December 1999. Efforts are being made to promote both organised and semi-organised repatriation. It has become extremely difficult to assess refugee numbers since many returnees decide to re-cross the border to Cote d'Ivoire; furthermore, large numbers of refugees are well integrated into the Ivoirian community.

Community-Health Programme w

Despite delays in the construction schedule, together with funding difficulties, the programme has moved ahead and results are much appreciated by the beneficiaries. Some 75% of the 108 planned health posts have been completed and the Health Promotion Centre in Danane is functioning. Statistics relating to consultations at the health posts show a reduction in the number of cases of the most common ailments. Nutritional education sessions take place at the Centre and the health post staff work towards awareness building in relation to STDs and HIV/AIDS. As a result of torrential rains during the rainy season, several of the health posts are in need of repair. This programme relies on the health agents, responsible for the management of the health posts, and is essential for the well-being of a population of 600,000 who would otherwise have no access to health facilities.

Disaster Preparedness and Capacity-Building Programmes w

Little has been achieved over the semester as a result of lack of funds and it was not possible to organise the planned training sessions. Nevertheless, new administrative and financial regulations were drawn up and adopted by the General Assembly. In July, the National Society opened a centre for first aid training in Abidjan, providing a much improved teaching environment. The Society has also initiated a course on the Red Cross Movement for school children attending classes during their holiday period.

Guinea

Relief and Repatriation w

In **Boké**, the Red Cross Society of Guinea (RCSG)/Federation took responsibility for re-grouping Guinea-Bissauan refugees at one site, Tamakene. A Federation Delegate and the local branch are responsible for all aspects of camp management, construction, provision of water and community services. Re-registration of refugees took place in May. In **Forécariah**, the tense situation on the border with Sierra Leone as a result of rebel incursions, led to the creation of a new camp, Kalia 2, and the transfer of those refugees whose camps were targeted by the rebels. The RCSG/Federation deals with construction, distribution of food and non-food items, and social support activities - there are over 60,000 refugees in nine camps in the Forécariah region.

The RCSG/Federation has taken on wider responsibilities since the refugee influx at the beginning of the year in **Guéckédou**. The GRCS and the Federation are working in 21 of the 92 camps in the region.

A social welfare programme has begun with the identification of volunteers and the setting up of offices. The Federation's social welfare delegate is expected to arrive in Guéckédou at the end of August. The National Society, together with a Federation Delegate in **N'Zérékore**, are working on various programme components: distribution of food and non-food items to vulnerable groups, repatriation, social support and income generation activities amongst the local population. Out of ten income-generating projects, only two have proved successful and there is a need for an in-depth evaluation of the project criteria. Returnees are issued with various practical items, including tools, to facilitate their return to Liberia. Numbers of refugees who remain in Guinea are difficult to calculate, particularly as there are many cases of refugees coming back to Guinea.

Community Health w

The sanitation project in the town of Guéckédou is continuing and has proved successful in reinforcing the image of the Red Cross. However, if the project is to continue, the purchase of a vehicle will be necessary. Construction of latrines in Guéckédou town is on-going and sanitation activities are planned for the market area in Boké. Local Branch personnel are aware of the need for behaviour change in order to reduce the incidence of cholera and other diarrhoeal diseases.

Institutional and Resource Development w

Over the semester, the Development Delegate undertook training sessions with five Branches in order to familiarise staff and volunteers with the Red Cross Movement and to provide guidance on good governance issues. In May, the Secretary General of the National Society undertook an exchange visit to Côte d'Ivoire in order to review NS structures and organisation. 31 emergency relief brigades have been set up at branch level. At the end of May a meeting of the Praia Group took place in Dalaba in order to evaluate the work of the Group to date.

Liberia

As a result of lack of funds (by April 1999 the Emergency Appeal had a coverage of only 1 per cent for operations in Liberia) the objectives and budget were revised. The target population was reduced from 450,000 to 150,000 and geographical coverage was also reduced. The Appeal response improved, and by the end of June, the overall coverage of the revised Appeal was 52%. However, contributions for the Relief and Development programmes cover less than 30% of the budget. The National Society has taken the initiative of streamlining its structure and reducing manpower at headquarters. Federation working advances to Chapter offices of the National Society have been discontinued and more emphasis is placed on developing sustainable support.

The needs in Liberia are overwhelming - health and sanitation facilities, together with shelter kits, and institutional and training support to the National Society Chapters located in remote resettlement areas - are urgent priorities. In view of recurrent insecurity in the country, particularly in Lofa county, North Liberia, there is an urgent need to build up the disaster preparedness capacity of the National Society so that it may reach some 5,000 vulnerable at any given time, in terms of emergency high calorie food and non-food materials, such as blankets and tarpaulins. The Red Cross Society of Liberia/Federation has entered into co-operation agreements with the government, UN agencies and NGOs working in the country to ensure maximum efficiency and non-duplication of efforts.

Health and Water and Sanitation w

The Red Cross is to provide support to six clinics in co-operation with the Ministry of Health. At present, one clinic situated at the National Society's Headquarters, is operational in Monrovia. There are an average of 650 consultations per month and the clinic staff give regular health talks to patients dealing with prevention of the most common ailments. A laboratory is attached to the clinic which was upgraded in May with reagents and equipment. The clinic and laboratory are intended as income-generating activities in order to sustain the operation of the facilities and to provide for costs incurred by the National Society. It is planned to open a further five clinics in Bomi, Nimba and Cape Mount Counties. A further two clinics, in Manolue, Maryland, and Grand Kru are also operational and a third clinic in Jarwodee, Grand Gedeh county, is being rehabilitated.

In Grand Gedeh, Grand Kru and Maryland Counties, the Netherlands Red Cross is supporting the implementation of health and watsan activities. Work has begun to provide 31,175 returnees with safe drinking water, preventive and curative health services through the rehabilitation of three health posts per County, and adequate sanitation in 22 towns. Necessary agreements have been signed, training sessions carried out for watsan volunteers, first aiders and community members and construction material transported to the sites. The Watsan Programme envisages the construction of 5 institutional pit latrines, 30 family latrines, seven wells and the organisation of community clean-up campaigns.

Relief w

As of June, it was estimated that 16,566 persons had been repatriated to Liberia since the beginning of the year, bringing the total repatriated to 107,104 persons. The government estimates that a further 209,000 Liberians have returned home spontaneously. The Red Cross distributes relief items - family and community kits - and food provided by the WFP, to returnees. Between May and June 1999, the Red Cross distributed a total of 1,643 family kits to returnees and IDPs. A further 345 family kits were distributed to returning IDP families, and 346 family kits were also pre-positioned for delivery in the months of July and August 1999. The Liberian Red Cross Society/Federation took responsibility for management of the transit centre, registration, and first aid services. Furthermore, the National Society served as an escort for the road convoys bringing returnees home and provided first aid en route. There are an estimated 60,000 IDPs in Monrovia who wish to return to their villages of origin. Emergency assistance is provided by the LNRCS/Federation to 5,000 Sierra Leonean refugees and 3,414 IDPs who have been displaced from conflict areas in Lofa and who have moved to the more secure environment of Lower Lofa. This is in the form of a one-time distribution of second-hand clothing, jerry cans, soap, children's' shoes, and tarpaulins.

Institutional Development w

Federation programmes were suspended between January and February 1999 as a result of financial irregularities. As a result, more rigorous internal controls were adopted and training provided to the National Society.

The recruitment process for a new Secretary General and Finance Officer of the National Society is in process. Several activities were successfully completed despite funding constraints. These include renovation of Chapter buildings and guest houses for income-generation in Bong, Nimba, Maryland and Grand Gedeh Chapters, fund-raising events, and the initiation of a vocational training programme for 120 war-affected youth in April last. Furthermore, regular governance meetings were held, management meetings also took place, and both monthly and quarterly reports were submitted by the National Society to the Delegation.

Sierra Leone

Humanitarian needs in Sierra Leone far exceed the assistance available from the government and the NGO community. It is estimated that there are approximately 100,000 displaced persons who have lost their homes and belongings, hundreds of thousands of people who were wounded or are amputees, and large-scale destruction of infrastructure. The Sierra Leone Red Cross Society (SLRCS) continued to provide services during the civil conflict, despite losses in personnel and essential equipment. Funds are urgently sought - as of early July the Appeal coverage was only 36 per cent. The following describes the major activities of the National Society since the outbreak of the conflict in Freetown.

Emergency First Aid Assistance w

Following the January 1999 events, the SLRCS mobilised available First Aid Emergency Preparedness volunteers to assist with casualties at the Connaught out-patients department. Between January and August, 2,399 patients with various injuries and illnesses were received and treated, among whom 575 were war-wounded. Duties performed by the First Aid volunteers included:

- { Reception and registration of new arrivals;
- { Lifting and assistance with patients unable to move on their own;

- { Reassuring patients and relatives;
- { Assisting nurses with cleaning and dressing of wounds.

Community Health w

The National Society continues garbage clearing exercises (during the initial days of the campaign a total of 2,292 tons of garbage were disposed of) on a monthly basis in support of government initiatives to improve sanitation in Freetown and in order to prevent the outbreak of epidemics. Essential drugs were provided to eight operational SLRCS clinics and health education sessions have been held for IDPs in camps and clinics. Furthermore, volunteers have been trained in environmental sanitation and the prevention of diarrhoeal diseases.

Relief w

In May, 30 MT of food were distributed to 2,540 beneficiaries in 20 institutions. In June, 24 institutions in Freetown received maize meal, vegetable oil and CSB for a total of 2,260 beneficiaries. In addition, 122 bales of blankets, 58 bales of clothing and 14 rolls of plastic sheeting were distributed. Non-food items were distributed to IDPs in Waterloo Camp where a total of 24,000 beneficiaries received blankets, clothing, plastic sheeting and jerry cans. A joint ICRC/Federation distribution was organised to assist a further 14,600 beneficiaries.

Blood w

The National Society is the major blood donor organisation in Sierra Leone. As such, 30% of screened blood is donated directly through the National Society which also supports organisations and services which provide a further 30% of blood available. A small blood unit was opened at the Connaught maternity hospital, 45 new donors recruited and 311 units of blood were collected by the mobile blood collection service. The National Society is in urgent need of further in-kind donations of specialised material to re-equip its blood bank.

Branch Development w

Branches in Bo, Kenema and Port Loko have resumed activities. Security concerns in other regions prevent other branches from functioning. Information-gathering also poses serious difficulties.

Outstanding needs

Funding for the Federation's Programmes in West Africa is essential if the programme objectives are to be met by the close of the year. Needs are particularly acute in Sierra Leone where the civil conflict has reaped large-scale destruction of life, livelihoods and infrastructure. As a result of looting, the National Society requirements are, first and foremost, operational equipment (vehicles, computers, motorbikes and radios) in order to be in a position to work to its full potential. The Sierra Leonean and Liberian refugee population in Guinea is in much need of support and Liberian returnees must be assisted so that they may resume a normal life in their villages of origin. Health, and water and sanitation initiatives are particularly important.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The National Societies/Federation have built up good relations with the UN agencies and the NGO community in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia; co-operation with other organisations has been secured in order to deliver more effective assistance. Regular meetings are held in order to ensure information exchange. In Côte d'Ivoire, the National Society has positive relations with the UNHCR and the WFP. Media interest in refugee issues in West Africa has diminished over the first half of the year.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

The Federation's operations in West Africa aim to assist hundreds of thousands of refugees, IDPs, returnees, as well as vulnerable communities which are stretched to the limit as they welcome displaced populations. PNS and donor organisations are encouraged to support these essential programmes in order to alleviate suffering, to promote successful repatriation initiatives, and to facilitate vulnerable communities' access to basic community services.

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