

LIBERIA: POPULATION MOVEMENTS

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The Disaster

On 8 July, the Government of Liberia reported that an armed group of Liberian dissidents operating from neighbouring Guinea, attacked the provincial town of Voinjama in Lofa county (approximately 384 kms north of the capital of Monrovia). Thousands of civilians fled the town into the bush and nearby towns and villages. Accusations by both sides over border raids launched by unidentified gunmen have created poor diplomatic relations between the two countries. President Lansana Conte of Guinea has accused Liberians of involvement in cross-border attacks on Guinean villages, while Liberia accuses Guinea of harbouring insurgents who are fighting government forces in northern Liberia.

Most recently, the Government has reported the shelling of Zorzor district by Guinean security forces. Reports say that the incident has resulted in some casualties of IDPs from Voinjama, who had taken refuge in Zorzor town. Over 1,500 IDPs have fled the war zone, travelling through the bush to towns as far away as Camp Anthe (125 kms from Voinjama) in Lower Lofa county. A population movement assessment was conducted by the Liberian National Red Cross Society (LNRCS), the Liberian Refugee Repatriation Resettlement Commission (LRRRC, a Government agency that coordinates the repatriation and resettlement of refugees, returnees and IDPs with NGOs), the Liberia Islamic United for Rural Development (LIURD, a local NGO that implements food distribution for WFP in selected areas of the country and is an implementing partner of UNHCR), and the LNRCS Bopulu and Gbarma Branches. A caseload of 800 persons and 75 Sierra Leone refugees were registered. It is also reported that as many as another 12,000 civilians have taken refuge in Gbarnga.

As a result of the continuous attacks since July, an estimated 15,000 Liberian have been displaced from Upper Lofa county and fled to other regions within the country. The Government of Liberia estimates that many more thousands are currently displaced within Liberia itself, while another 3,000 are remaining in Guinea to be repatriated.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

Since the 8 July incident in Lofa County, the Red Cross has been hampered by security constraints in delivering humanitarian assistance to IDPs in Lofa county, and the Government has not permitted humanitarian agencies to travel to the area due to the on-going conflict. The LNRCS is operational in the Upper Lofa conflict area (supported by the ICRC) as well as in Lower Lofa (a safe haven area where

IDPs are taking refuge), supported by the Federation. Both areas accommodate large displaced populations.

Upper Lofa County •

On 8 September the Government of Liberia requested the Liberian National Red Cross Society and the International Committee of the Red Cross to assist the victims which had been displaced due to the conflict in Lofa county. On 12 September, a four man team composed of the ICRC and LNRCS relief volunteers from the Bong Chapter conducted a 3-day needs assessment in ten (10) towns in Salayea and Zorzor districts in Lofa county. The assessment concluded that approximately 7,270 persons were displaced due to the conflict, and on 21 September the LNRCS and ICRC commenced the distribution of non-food items to IDPs. However, the distribution was halted when some of the communities came under artillery attack, allegedly from the Guinean security forces across the border. An emergency package consisting of one set of cooking pots, one piece of tarpaulin, blankets, one metal bucket and soap was distributed to beneficiaries in Salayea, Kpayea, Yarpuah, Gbanway, and Telemai. Approximately 2,053 persons received assistance before the operation had to be suspended due to insecurity.

Table 1
The estimated number of Internally Displaced Persons in Zorzor and Salayea Districts in Upper Lofa County:

Towns	Adults		Elderly		Lac. Mothers	Preg Women	Children 0-4 yrs		Children 6-15 yrs		Total	
	M	F	M	F			M	F	M	F	Families	Persons
Salayea	4	5	6	13	15	3	11	16	7	9	35	89
Kpayea	4	2	3	0	0	0	10	12	12	16	15	59
Fissibu	3	52	26	38	45	0	51	98	75	78	100	498
Konia	1	248	195	209	168	104	768	821	1,104	1,492	843	5,298
Sucreamu	6	8	9	6	16	8	29	45		53	50	248
Yarpuah	5	1	0	0	0	0	9	7	3	5	7	30
Zorzor	8	95	26	24	13	10	153	168	54	69	70	701
Borkeza	8	11	22	35	11	9	69	53	39	45	60	302
Gbanway	2	5	3	3	2	0	9	9	5	3	10	32
Telemai	5	6	8	2	2	0	4	2	12	8	5	13
Total	3	433	298	330	272	134	1,113	1,231	1,379	1,778	1,195	7,270

On 27 September the LNRCS Watsan Co-ordinator and Bong Chapter Relief Officer participated in a one-day technical assessment (representing the Emergency Watsan Committee) in upper Lofa county to ascertain “on the spot” the water, sanitation and health situation. Other members consisted of ACF, Lutheran World Service, and the Government. Food is available in the area, but the IDPs do not have the purchasing power to buy food. However, they are engaged in food-for-work schemes with the local community to sustain themselves (such as weeding grass and bushes), therefore the IDP presence in town is limited. The IDPs lack food, shelter and clothing, and they appear to be moving from one place to another in search of food and shelter. Some households are headed by children, and women and children constitute the highest percentage of IDPs and are the most vulnerable beneficiaries. An estimated 600 IDPs are staying at the Lutheran hospital grounds in Zorzor.

A total of eight towns were assessed and below are the findings and recommendations. The implementation of the recommendations will depend on the improvement of the present security situation.

Presently, all activities have been suspended for security reasons, and operations will resume when the government can guarantee the safety of staff and relief goods.

Table 2
Watsan and Health Survey in Upper Lofa county:

Town	No. IDPs	No. Hand pumps	No. Latrines	Clinic	Recommendations
Barzewien	1,300	2	2 IL	1 clinic Malaria, Diarrhoea, ARI	H/pumps repairs. Drug supply is insufficient and should be supplemented.
Luyema	1,442	4	2 IL	Same as above	Repair 2 h/pumps and FLS is needed.
Konia	1,820	3	3 IL	Same, and in addition cases of bloody diarrhoea.	Repair 1 h/pump and replace one. FLS needed.
Zuwulor	853	1	0	1 clinic Malaria, diarrhoea, ARI	Repair 1 h/pump, Fls and 1IL needed.
Fessibu	700	3	2 IL	Same as above	Fls and 1 IL needed.
Zorzor	815	8	5 IL	Same and treatment of wounded soldiers	Repair 4 h/pumps and an additional Fls needed.
Sucromu	620	6	1 IL	1 clinic Malaria, diarrhoea, ARI	Repair 4 h/pumps and Fls needed.
Salayea	2,675	8	1 IL	Same as above	Repair 2 h/pumps and Fls is needed.

IL = Institutional latrine

Fls = Family latrine

To respond to the immediate emergency needs of the victims the following relief items are required:

- Distribution of jerry cans or water barrels and chlorine tablets for household chlorinating;
- Distribution of domed slabs casted in Gbarnga and tools for digging family latrine pits;
- Health hygiene education;
- Setting-up of family latrine pit digging team (compensated with food-for-work);
- Distribution of plastic sheeting and nails for latrine superstructures;
- Repair of hand pumps, whose spare parts are readily available.

From 1 to 5 October, the LNRCS and ICRC completed the distribution of non-food items to 4,565 persons (979 families) in ten communities in Zorzor and Salayea districts. The relief assistance for 236 families that were not present during the distribution was handed over to the LNRCS Bong Chapter for storage in the Gbanga warehouse. ICRC also provided an additional consignment of plastic sheeting to the LNRCS Chapter, and food commodities will be released once the security situation has improved and it is safe to return to the districts. Due to the present circumstances, however, activities have been halted for security reasons in Upper Lofa county, while limited operational work is continuing in the relatively safe areas of Lower Lofa county.

Lower Lofa County •

A two-day (28-29 September) joint assessment mission to Lower Lofa County (Camp Anthel which is a logging company camp located in western Liberia, 175 kms from Monrovia) was conducted by the LNRCS and Federation Relief and Health departments. The LNRCS's Gbarma and Bopolu Branches report that the IDPs started arriving from Voinjama, Foyah and Kolahun districts (travelling through the forest and bush for eight days) on 28 August seeking refuge at Camp Anthel. The first arrivals (150 persons) were led by the Majesty of Voinjama. Approximately ten persons arrived daily, while six persons departed daily to villages nearby and Monrovia. During a two week period, 790 persons were registered. The remaining IDPs have integrated into the local population in the camp. Also, in other nearby towns an additional 200 IDPs have taken refuge in Joseph Town and 150 in Mulbah Town. The IDPs are suffering from chronic food shortage and are living mainly on wild yams and sugar cane. To help feed their families, the male IDPs work as labourers carrying out tasks such as brushing, hauling sand, and doing local chores. According to the IDPs, they left all their personal and household belongings behind, and only escaped with the clothes they were wearing. Many IDPs were diagnosed with malaria, scabies, respiratory tract infection (RTI) and possible worm infection. Based on the urgent emergency needs, relief assistance was provided to 25 families.

Table 3 - Non-food distribution at Camp Anthel:

F/H	F/S	Mosquito Net	Clothing	Plastic Sheeting	Soap	Jerry Cans
25	134	25 pcs	124 pcs	25 pcs	85 pcs	25 PCs

Each family received an emergency package consisting of one mosquito net, one piece of plastic sheeting, one jerry can, three pcs of soap and an assortment of clothing based on the need.

The LNRCS Gbarma Branch Relief Officer and a Government Field Officer conducted a three day (30 September - 2 October) assessment and registration of IDPs at Camp Anthel, Mulbah Town and Joseph Hadie villages. A targeted population of 615 persons (197 families) was registered and distribution was scheduled to start on Saturday, 14 October at Camp Anthel. An emergency package consists of one cooking pot set, one jerry can, 2 pieces of laundry soap, 2 blankets and one mosquito net, plus 2 pieces of clothing. The distribution will be conducted by the LNRCS Branch and monitored by the LNRCS and Federation Relief department.

Government of Liberia organised repatriation of Liberians from Guinea:

On 11 October, the Ministry of Health requested the Red Cross to assist in the reception and resettlement of 1,000 returnees. On 12 October at 6:30 a.m. 403 returnees arrived at the Free Port of Monrovia from Guinea after a two-day travel on board a Sierra Leonean registered vessel. The returnees consisting mostly of women and children who had been living for the past three weeks at the Liberian Embassy in Guinea after they were arrested by the Guinean government on claims that they were in support of the rebel incursion into Guinea. Many of the returnees were in poor health due to living out in the open environment for the past few weeks, they were immediately assessed by the Ministry of Health and MSF medical teams and transported to the hospital.

At the transit centre, the relevant Government agency (as the co-ordinating body), the Red Cross, UNHCR, WFP, and IAS (an implementing partner of UNHCR) jointly co-ordinated the assistance to be provided for the returnees:

- **LRRRC:** Government co-ordination agency and providing camp management.
- **WFP:** responsible for providing emergency food rations.
- **LNRCS and Federation:** responsible for jointly conducting the registration and providing medical assistance with IAS, providing and distributing non-food items (clothing, baby kits, blankets, and mosquito nets). Also, the special needs cases will be referred to the Red Cross (diabetics, pregnant women and the handicapped).
- **UNHCR:** responsible for assisting with non-food items (plastic mats and bathing soap), and coordinating food requirements with WFP.
- **IAS:** jointly with the Red Cross, conducting the registration of the returnees and providing medical assistance. Also, providing mass care feeding and support shelter management.

On 12 October, all returnees were registered, provided shelter and food; non-food items were planned for distribution on 13 October. It is expected that the returnees will be housed for 3-5 days at the transit centre and the Government will provide transport to their village of origin. Most of the returnees are from Montserrado county (an estimated 310 persons).

The following non-food items were dispatched from the Federation warehouse to the transit centre for distribution by the LNRCS Relief volunteers:

- Blankets: 357 pieces
- Clothing: 6 bales
- Baby Kits: 3 bales
- Mosquito Nets: 100 pieces
- Medical Kit: 1

Co-operation with other agencies

An interagency co-ordination committee has been established consisting of the Red Cross, NGOs, Government, the UN and other humanitarian agencies to address the needs of the displaced and ensure that there is no duplication of services. Also, sectoral sub-committees are established to put in place a plan of action for the effective co-ordination of the humanitarian intervention in the effected areas. The established sectorial committees are health, water and sanitation (the Red Cross is a member), food and non-food (the Red Cross is a member).

A three-day joint assessment consisting of the Red Cross and several International NGOs and led by the LRRRC was conducted on 14 September covering 15 towns. The assessment findings concluded that there was a chronic food shortage problem, and the presence of malaria, diarrhoea, acute respiratory infection, worms and wounds in a population of 12,487 displaced persons.

WFP had agreed to provide a one month-ration of food (consisting of maize meal, vegetable oil, and pulses) for IDPs affected by the conflict. The emergency food commodities will be released to the ICRC and distributed by the LNRCS Chapters and Branches. The first consignment, an estimated 62.5 metric tons, will be released to assist 7,217 persons. Several national and regional meetings were held among the member states of the Mano River Union of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea during the past months. Efforts have also been made by the Interfaith Council of Liberia, the ECOWAS and OAU.

Needs

In the event of an additional influx of IDPs from the conflict areas in Upper Lofa County, the LNRCS proposes to assist an estimated 2,000 internally displaced families (10,000 persons) plus another 3,000 returnees from Guinea. The LNRCS and Federation plan to provide basic emergency mass care feeding, water and sanitation facilities, emergency health services, and a distribution of non-food relief items (clothing, cooking pots, jerry cans, plastic sheeting, blankets, bath and laundry soap and plastic mats).

The delegation is seeking funds to cover distribution, transportation, and replenishment of the items distributed.

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