

# The Case of Guinea

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## FOREWORD

Since its foundation in 1997, the Active Learning Network on Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP) has consistently highlighted the relationship between humanitarian agencies and affected populations as critical to the accountability and performance of the humanitarian sector, and the active participation of affected populations as fundamental to their self-determination and dignity.

Although ALNAP member agencies share an understanding of the right of affected people to have a say in actions affecting their lives, given the difficulties in the midst of an emergency, many questions remain as to how, when and with whom. The debate on participation in humanitarian action, albeit well intentioned, has been characterised by assumption and expectation, with too little supporting evidence and too little participation by members of the affected populations.

The Global Study on the consultation with and participation by affected populations in humanitarian action is the first major effort to seek answers and increase understanding through a direct focus on current practice in the field – eg, how do agencies and affected populations interact? what are the opportunities for participation? why are such opportunities lost? – combining researcher, practitioner, national and international perspectives in each of the study teams. However, participation is not a simple matter of methodology, it requires a willingness to share power, to recognise and respond to the rights of affected populations and to support self-determination proactively.

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While not expecting simple answers, the Working Group has high expectations of the Global Study, which aims to provide humanitarian agencies and their personnel with guidance, insights and reference points to help determine, in dialogue with affected populations, how to maximise participation in a given situation.

The Guinea study is the pilot in a series of six country studies and resulting monographs that, together with an extensive literature review, will provide the basis for a Practitioner Handbook and Overview Book.

The Working Group would like to thank Groupe URD, especially Francois Grünewald, Karla Levy Simancas, Bonaventure Gbétoho Sokpoh, Mamadou Bobo Diallo and Anna Lear for their extensive work. Furthermore, we would like to thank the Global Study donors – CAFOD, CIDA, Concern Worldwide, DFID/CHAD, ECHO, MFA Germany, MFA Netherlands, SCUK, Sida and USAID/OFDA – for their financial support, and finally many thanks to all those who facilitated the team in-country.

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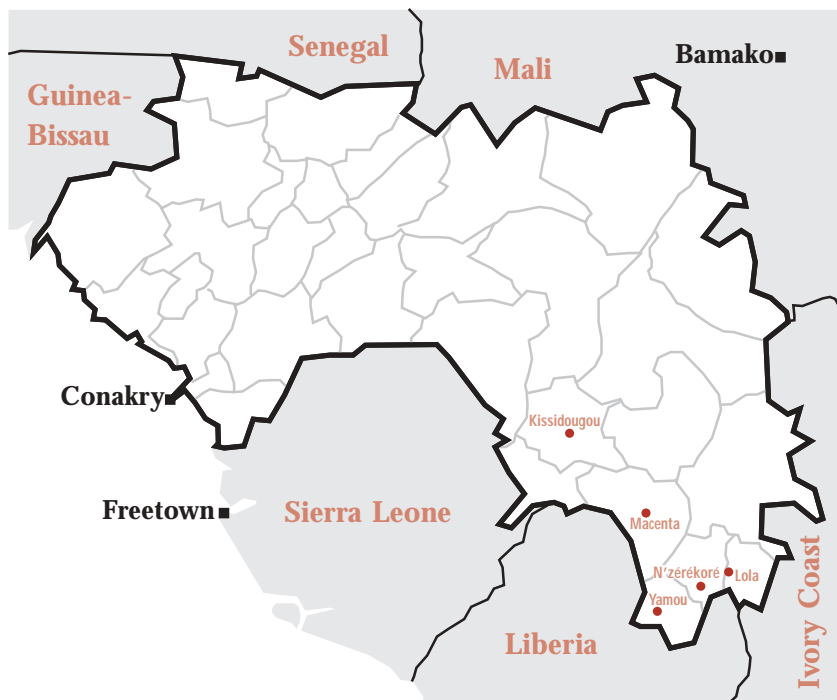
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*The research team*

## GUINEA

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## ACRONYMS

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<b>ACF-E</b>	Action Contre la Faim – Spain
<b>ACT</b>	Action by Churches Together
<b>ADRIP</b>	Association Développement de la Riziculture Intense et du Palmier
<b>ALNAP</b>	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action
<b>ARC</b>	American Refugee Committee
<b>AVR</b>	Association Villageoise et Réfugiée pour la confection de toilettes et de douches
<b>BMS</b>	Brigade Mixte de Sécurité
<b>BCR</b>	Bureau de Coordination de Réfugiés
<b>BNCR</b>	Bureau Nationale de Coordination de Réfugiés
<b>CAADA</b>	Community Action Against AIDS and Drug Abuse
<b>CECI</b>	Centre d'Étude Canadien de Coopération Internationale
<b>CFT</b>	Cash for Training
<b>CFW</b>	Cash for Work
<b>CNSAH</b>	Comité National de Suivi de l'Action Humanitaire
<b>CRD</b>	Communauté Rurale de Développement
<b>CRG</b>	Croix Rouge Guinéenne
<b>CU</b>	Concern Universal
<b>CVT</b>	Centre pour les Victimes de Traumatismes
<b>DDR</b>	Demobilisation, disarmament and rehabilitation
<b>DPS</b>	Direction Préfectorale de Santé
<b>DNF</b>	Direction Nature et Forêt
<b>ECHO</b>	European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office
<b>ECOMOG</b>	West African peacekeeping mission

<b>ECOWAS</b>	Economic Community of West African States
<b>ERM</b>	Enfants Réfugiés du Monde
<b>EUPD</b>	Entraide Universitaire Pour le Développement
<b>FANCI</b>	Forces Armées Nationales de Côte d'Ivoire
<b>FAO</b>	The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
<b>FFW</b>	Food For Work
<b>GBV</b>	Gender-Based Violence
<b>GLPP</b>	Gender Literacy Pilot Project
<b>GRET</b>	Groupe de recherche et d'échanges technologiques
<b>Groupe URD</b>	Groupe Urgence Réhabilitation Développement
<b>GTZ</b>	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit
<b>ICRC</b>	International Committee of the Red Cross
<b>IDP</b>	Internally displaced person
<b>IFRC</b>	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
<b>IGP</b>	Income Generating Project
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>INGO</b>	International Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>INPFL</b>	Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia
<b>IRC</b>	International Rescue Committee
<b>JRS</b>	Jesuit Refugee Service
<b>LRRD</b>	Linking relief, rehabilitation and development
<b>LURD</b>	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy
<b>MAGE</b>	Men's Association for Gender Equality
<b>MDE</b>	Le Monde des Enfants
<b>MODEL</b>	Movement for Democracy in Liberia
<b>MPCI</b>	Mouvement Patriotique de Côte d'Ivoire
<b>MPIGO</b>	Mouvement Populaire Ivoirien du Grand Nord
<b>MPJ</b>	Mouvement pour la Justice et la Paix
<b>MSF-B</b>	Médecins Sans Frontières – Belgium
<b>MSF-CH</b>	Médecins Sans Frontières – Switzerland
<b>MSF-F</b>	Médecins Sans Frontières – France
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>NPRC</b>	National Provisional Ruling Council
<b>NPFL</b>	National Patriotic Front of Liberia

<b>NPFL-CRC</b>	National Patriotic Front of Liberia - Central Revolutionary Council
<b>OAU</b>	Organisation of African Unity
<b>OCHA</b>	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>OCPH</b>	Organisation Catholique pour la Promotion Humaine
<b>ODIC</b>	Organisation pour le Développement Intégré Communautaire
<b>PRA</b>	Participatory Rural Appraisal
<b>PU</b>	Première Urgence
<b>RUF</b>	Revolutionary United Front
<b>SCF</b>	Save the Children Fund
<b>SRR</b>	Secours Rapide Rural
<b>SENAH</b>	Service National des Affaires Humanitaires
<b>SNAPE</b>	Service National d'Aménagement des Points d'Eau
<b>TWIN</b>	Today's Women International Network
<b>ULIMO</b>	United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organisation



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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### Part 1

### INTRODUCTION

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The participation and consultation of affected populations and beneficiaries in humanitarian action now seems widely accepted as crucial to effective social targeting, resource utilisation, accountability, sustainability and impact. Beyond operational considerations, for some, participation is a fundamental right of citizenship, essential to survival, self-protection and self-actualisation in humanitarian emergencies. It is also a means through which humanitarian actors can demonstrate their respect for disaster-affected populations. As such, the participation of affected populations has become a central tenet of policy for a number of humanitarian agencies.

Despite policy-level commitments, there remains wide variation in practice. It is against this background that ALNAP commissioned the Global Study on Consultation with and Participation by Affected Populations in the Planning, Managing, Monitoring and Evaluation of Humanitarian Action, seeking to understand how participatory approaches can be established in crisis contexts.

Guinea is one of six country cases studies chosen on the basis of geographic and socio-cultural diversity within emergency contexts. It is a

country at the heart of a region that has experienced a complex succession of conflict-related displacements; a West African ethnography and culture; a broad variety of humanitarian actors attempting to meet profound assistance and protection needs on both a national and international level. Humanitarian action in Guinea, as elsewhere in the region, has largely taken place in the absence of a highly-developed national legal framework or strong national structures able to deliver basic services.

In Guinea, research was carried out in all the major refugee camps in Guinée Forestière, as well as in some surrounding villages, including Krimissadou, Farawaya, Boréah, Madina, Yomadou, Téli-koro and Lainé.

The main aim of our research was to determine whether in Guinea *the participation of the affected population in humanitarian action is both feasible and beneficial in terms of project outcomes and long term social impact.*

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## Part 2 THE OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

Since the early 1990s, West Africa has been gripped by a succession of violent conflicts. The three main conflict zones, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Ivory Coast, have created several million refugees or internally displaced. Refugees from each of these conflicts arrived in Guinea, in addition to a large number of internally displaced from within the country. In January 2002, Guinea was cited by UNHCR as hosting the largest number of refugees in Africa.

The conflicts can be briefly summarised as follows: in Liberia over the past two decades, a series of civil wars and almost permanent high levels of insecurity led large numbers of Liberians to seek refuge in neighbouring countries. Numbers have been particularly high in the past two years with



the emergence of the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the ensuing civil war.

In Sierra Leone during the 1990s, the emergence of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) led to a brutal and protracted civil war, where almost unimaginable acts of violence and intimidation were directed at the civilian population, particularly in rural areas. Insecurity, a lack of access to land, and widespread economic collapse saw some 600,000 Sierra Leoneans become refugees in neighbouring countries in the sub-region, especially in Guinea.

In September 2002, conflict broke out in the hitherto relatively stable Ivory Coast, where clashes between various rebel groups and government troops in the northern and western parts of the country marked the beginning of civil war that continues to the time of writing. The extent of the crisis in Ivory Coast can be measured by the number of internally displaced persons, which has been estimated as high as 1,300,000.

## Part 3

## FINDINGS

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The Study identifies a range of different issues concerning participation. Discourse in respect of what drives participation is equally varied. Some aid agencies are pragmatic, seeking participation as a means to increase operational efficiency, for example through savings in costs or time. Others see participation as a means of facilitating access to affected populations. Above all, though, participation is sought because populations demand it.

The different forms and applications of participation were studied in relation to each stage of the project cycle. Given that the crisis in West Africa has given rise to such high levels of displacement, the analytical framework that has been used has been to look at participation in each of

the main stages of a population movement. Participation is then further explored by sector.

## **1 Participation throughout the various stages of population movement**

### **Preliminary period**

■ **Phase 1: Arrival in host country** During an acute emergency phase, the urgent nature of refugees' needs, with key protection priorities, together have an impact on the cost/benefit relationship of implementing participatory techniques with the affected population

■ **Phase 2: Temporary settlement** A quick understanding of the major ethnic and cultural considerations specific to the affected populations and their early integration into humanitarian programmes is essential in the temporary phase. Indeed, the failure to involve refugees in important processes such as allocating tent space or adopting 'prescriptive' ways of organising the population such as creating refugee committees or tent/zone leaders) will usually heighten tension and ethnic or cultural sensitivities.

### **Settling-in period**

■ **Phase 3: Creation of a refugee camp** The participation of host and refugee or IDP communities in the siting and setting up of refugee camps can make an obvious and important contribution to the establishing of good relations between refugees and villagers. Participation is an important means of building upon rather than jeopardising the solidarity that host communities usually feel for refugees on their arrival.

■ **Phase 4: Day-to-day running of the camp** Participation is critical for the effective day-to-day running of the camp. In Guinea, information is passed to refugees via representatives from UNHCR and from the Bureau National de Co-ordination de Réfugiés (BNCR), as well as via Refugee Committees in the camps. However, the BCR stated that it would like

more information as it endeavours to participate more fully in co-ordination activities. Since the Refugee Committee is a central pillar within the camp, it is informed about activities that will be implemented in the camp and is responsible for passing on this information directly to the refugees. Committee members are certain that for many activities, their participation guarantees maximum effectiveness.

■ **Phase 5: Transfer to new locations** For voluntary transfer to take place, communication with affected populations, at the earliest possible stage of the process of planning transfers, is essential.

### Departure

■ **Phase 6: Resettlement, repatriation and camp closure** During this phase, it is essential that humanitarian actors aim to communicate with affected populations with as much transparency as possible. Providing regular information on the number of available places for resettlement, details of application procedures and the status of ongoing applications will reduce misunderstandings and should significantly lessen any negative effects of resettlement, repatriation or camp closures. The ‘closing-down’ process clearly illustrates how important it is for actors to instigate and continue to implement participatory methods throughout the existence of the refugee camps. This can be done by nurturing dialogues initiated while setting up the camps and continually expanding communication strategies.

## 2 Participation by sector

■ **Sector 1: Basic services (such as food, water and sanitation, health, non-food item distribution and shelter)** In too many humanitarian operations, the needs assessment phase is often reduced to a series of highly technical sectoral assessments. The involvement of refugees or refugee organisations (committees, associations or groups of refugees) in the design phase is currently extremely limited. It is often pointed out by humanitarian actors that refugees do not have the specific skills or experience required for this task, but the case study does not support this assumption.

■ **Sector 2: Education** Issues related to cultural specificity are especially significant when providing education services to refugee populations. Language and appropriate curriculae are key factors in determining participation.

■ **Sector 3: Economic activity** Where good relationships are forged between refugees and villagers, they often can be explained by the existence of economic benefits available for villagers. Identifying these can depend on the way in which humanitarian actors and villagers establish contact. Equally important is the degree of participation of landowners, and host communities in the decision about where to set up the refugee camps. Good practice here can significantly limit the risk of conflict between refugee and host populations.

■ **Sector 4: Socio-cultural activities** Once basic needs are more or less provided for, a general mobilisation should occur within a refugee community in order to complete a range of socio-cultural activities proposed by humanitarian actors. It is the responsibility of aid agencies to consult with affected populations in order to identify which activities are most appropriate for them to implement, and to dedicate the necessary resources to doing so.

## Part 4

## CONCLUSIONS

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As was concluded in the earlier ALNAP studies, the main lesson from Guinea is that the participation of affected populations in humanitarian action is not only feasible, desirable and beneficial, but essential. However, the degree to which participatory approaches are undertaken, in what form and with what success, remain highly dependent on three elements that are intrinsically linked:

These are,

- i **Contextual** (eg, security, access, phase of population movement, urgency of meeting basic needs, level of resources available for humanitarian programmes etc)
- ii **Institutional** (eg, the type of institution involved and whether it is national or international; its principles, knowledge, experience, ability and commitment of staff etc)
- iii **Demographic** (eg, the history and culture of the refugee population, length of time they have already spent in the camp or as refugees elsewhere, past structures of internal organisation etc)

The Guinea study identifies a wide range of significant advantages of participation in refugee contexts. In order for humanitarian actors to achieve those benefits, they need to invest in the following steps:

- i Improving communication, in order to overcome both cultural and linguistic barriers,
- ii Responding to certain needs that humanitarian programmes do not routinely provide for,
- iii Establishing a good relationship between refugees and host communities,
- iv Synchronising programmes in sectors such as education with existing systems in the country of origin, in order to give activities the necessary long-term outlook,
- v Promoting self-reliance amongst affected populations.

The study also identified a number of reasons for why past humanitarian programmes have not involved affected populations to the extent that is considered both desirable and necessary. The primary causes were as follows:

- i The critical physical and psychological state in which many refugees arrive;

- ii The limited capacity of humanitarian actors to be able to respond to the expectations of the population;
- iii The difficulties experienced by many international organisations in collaborating with Guinean NGOs and refugee associations;
- iv A shortage of skills required to implement participatory methods and tools;
- v A feeling among some humanitarian actors that whatever is offered, refugees will always demand more.

The Guinea study highlights the importance of taking into account the other 'actors', not just humanitarian actors and understanding participation as a genuinely two-way process and not as a top-down relationship.

## Part 5

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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The recommendations of the study identify six main areas that address both conceptual and practical considerations:

- **Participation is an approach** agencies must continually strive to push the message that participation is an approach that must permeate all aspects of their humanitarian work at all times, and not just a box to tick. Institutional mandates, values and ways of working all have a role to play in reinforcing this central message.
- **Comprehensive participatory needs assessment** current needs assessments tend to lack an overall vision of the expectations and needs of affected populations, and instead concentrate on basic needs. It is essential that aid agencies make better use of the views of local actors, individual refugees, and traditional representative bodies in their quest for designing the best possible interventions and at the same time building trust.
- **Coordinating approaches** humanitarian actors need to extend their coordination efforts to include sharing experiences on participation, and

carrying out group reflection on the most effective strategies and working methods for increasing the involvement of affected populations.

■ **Having the right staff with the right capacities** humanitarian actors need to do more to encourage participation. Options include promoting training programmes for international and national staff on participatory techniques, and allocating sufficient resources in programme budgets for these activities. It is also crucial for them to try to limit high staff turnover, especially of expatriate staff.

■ **Improving communication systems** humanitarian actors need to communicate more routinely with refugees on important issues that concern them.

■ **Participation and linking relief, rehabilitation and development** if involving affected populations in decisions that affect their future in the short-term is important, it is absolutely essential for decisions involving their long-term futures, such as whether or not to return to their countries of origin, settle where they are, or seek resettlement in a third country. Opportunities exist to adopt participatory approaches for each alternative, such as by giving the population the opportunity to meet and talk with groups of refugees who have already returned, or with NGOs present on the other side of the border. For refugees who opt for the alternative of settling in the host country, the participatory strategy should be based on providing them with support in their efforts to integrate into local communities, which may reduce possible stigmatisation.





# 1

## INTRODUCTION

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### 1.1

#### BACKGROUND

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The participation and consultation of affected populations and beneficiaries in humanitarian action now seem widely accepted as crucial to effective social targeting, resource utilisation, accountability, sustainability and impact. Beyond operational considerations, for some, participation is a fundamental right of citizenship, essential to survival, self-protection and self-actualisation in humanitarian emergencies. It is also a means through which humanitarian actors can demonstrate their respect for disaster-affected populations. As such, the participation of affected populations has become a central tenet of policy for a number of humanitarian agencies.

Despite policy-level commitments, there remains wide variation in practice. It is against this background that ALNAP, commissioned the Global Study on Consultation with and Participation by Affected Populations in the Planning, Managing, Monitoring and Evaluation of Humanitarian Action. This report on Guinea presents the findings from one of the six country case studies that provide the empirical field data for the Global Study, with the core objectives to:

- assess current consultation and participation practice in a range of emergency contexts;
- identify examples of good practice;

- identify gaps or inadequacies in current practice and contributing factors; and,
- improve understanding of participation and consultation practice.

The Guinea monograph is one of a series of six country case studies which provide the empirical field data for the global project, seeking to reveal the mechanisms through which the voice of affected populations can be enhanced within the humanitarian system, while remaining alert to the difficulties of implementing aid interventions in emergency contexts. As the primary stakeholders in humanitarian action, affected populations are situated at the centre of the Global Study, which attempts to understand how they perceive and interact with the myriad of governmental, international, national, local and other institutions that manage, regulate, control and influence the delivery of humanitarian assistance and protection. Wherever possible, successful consultative and participatory mechanisms and initiatives are identified and promoted.

In addition to six country monographs and a *Practitioner Handbook*, the wider issues raised by the country case studies (eg, the inherent challenges and contradictions that exist in attempts to engage in participative approaches and the steps needed to develop a more beneficiary-centred approach) are discussed and developed in greater depth in an *Overview Book*, in which the results of the theoretical and field research are compiled.

The trend towards increased participation is underpinned by growing recognition that beneficiaries are not just passive recipients of humanitarian aid, but social actors with insights into their situation, as well as competencies, energy and ideas that can be harnessed to improve their circumstances

The Guinea case study provides part of the empirical field data for the global project, seeking to reveal the mechanisms through which the voice of affected populations can be enhanced within the humanitarian system, while remaining alert to the difficulties of engaging in such processes in emergency contexts. As the primary stakeholders in humanitarian action, affected populations are situated at the centre of the Global Study, which

attempts to understand how they perceive and interact with the myriad of governmental, international, national, local and other institutions that manage, regulate, control and influence the delivery of humanitarian assistance and protection. Wherever possible, successful, consultative and participatory mechanisms and initiatives are identified and promoted.

The Guinea monograph is organised in four chapters. The first sets out the methodology used for the Guinea case study and the second provides a brief description of the geographical and social context of Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia and the Ivory Coast, along with a historical perspective on the humanitarian situation. The third chapter presents the findings of the study. The final chapter analyses these findings through a discussion of the factors that affect participation and consultation in humanitarian action, and closes with a series of recommendations for aid practitioners, at a field and headquarters level.

## 1.2

## THE GUINEA CASE STUDY

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### 1.2.1 Why Guinea ?

Guinea has witnessed a protracted humanitarian crisis over the past ten years. Over this time, the situation in Guinea has become increasingly precarious. Guinea hosts the largest number of refugees in West Africa, the majority of whom are concentrated in the southern region known as Guinée Forestière. The region has become a crossroads, both in social, economic and humanitarian terms.

Several different populations can be identified in Guinée Forestière. These are:

- refugees (the great majority of whom are from Sierra Leone, Liberia and Ivory Coast);
- economic migrants in transit from countries such as Burkina Faso and Mali;

- Guinean IDPs uprooted from their homes during the attacks on Guéckédou and Macenta in 2000;
- Guinean returnees who had earlier taken refuge in neighbouring countries;
- Guinean citizens who were previously living in Ivory Coast and who have now returned to Guinea as a result of the conflict in Ivory Coast;
- the Guinean host population.

The Guinea case study presents a clear opportunity to explore and understand participation of refugee populations in a context with the following characteristics:

■ **Various interlocking crises** Since 1989, each of the countries bordering Guinée Forestière has witnessed a series of internal conflicts. Although now tentatively undergoing a peace-building process, Sierra Leone witnessed a brutal and decade-long civil war; Liberia, has seen repeated episodes of warfare and considerable insecurity over the same period, culminating in the recent rebel insurgency; for its part, the previously more stable Ivory Coast, has recently seen growing political tension and armed clashes (see Section 2.1).

■ **Ethnic diversity** Numerous ethnic groups from the four countries, each with its own specific traditions and culture, are now living in close proximity to one another in the camps and settlements of Guinée Forestière.

■ **Waves of population displacement** Over the past fifteen years, armed conflict has prompted waves of refugees to flood into the region of Guinée Forestière, dramatically effecting local demographics. It has been estimated that at one point there were as many as 500,000 refugees, (see Table 2 and Box 1). Onward displacement towards the interior of the country has also been observed.

■ **Complicated protection issues on a national and international level** In the above mentioned context, the role of the United Nations agencies -the UNHCR in particular- has been principally to offer assistance to refugee

populations, and to ensure that they have the international protection to which they are entitled.

■ **Wide range of international, national and local organisations present in the area**

The major humanitarian actors operating in the region are United Nations agencies and international NGOs. Nevertheless, given the significant impact that population displacement has had on the country's administration and indeed the very way the country is run, this report therefore highlights the important role of national actors. Of particular note are the Bureau National de Coordination des Réfugiés (BNCR) and its regional branches, the Bureau de Coordination des Réfugiés (BCR), administrative departments (health, environment, housing, etc.), as well as local NGOs and other Guinean organisations.

### 1.2.2 Hypotheses and Research Questions

The basic hypothesis of this study is that: *the participation of the affected population in humanitarian action is both feasible and beneficial in terms of project outcomes and long term social impact.* To validate this hypothesis, it is necessary to observe the forms of participation that exist and analyse their impact on the effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, sustainability/connectedness and timeliness of humanitarian programmes.

In addition to this hypothesis, the research team established a series of research questions.

**Participation: why?**

- Is it simply to facilitate the work of NGOs? To facilitate needs assessment, beneficiary selection, the reduction of project costs through beneficiary inputs or the use of cheaper local agents?
- Is it to reduce levels of insecurity to which expatriates are exposed by implementation through local partners?
- Is it to respond to donor requirements, and enable a paragraph on participation to be included in the project formulation?
- Does it result from consideration that the process of consultation and

participation can radically improve the short and medium-term impact of humanitarian action?

- Is it to respond to the specific demands of the affected population?
- Is it to have a long-term impact on the vulnerability and capacity of affected populations?

**Participation: who?**

- The individual beneficiary. Do an individual's characteristics – gender, age, and social identity – impact on the process of participation?
- Local institutions. What kind of institution participates in humanitarian action: traditional, post-socialist organisations, institutions created following structural adjustment, associations formed to take advantage of the influx of humanitarian aid?
- Humanitarian aid organisations: Is it possible to use 'participatory techniques' throughout the project cycle if the organisation itself does not use the approach for its in-house operations?

**Participation: how?**

- Respect for humanitarian principles in the process of participation. Should the programme's efficiency be given priority over the principles of independence and impartiality? What should be done if participation contributes to discrimination against certain participants? How can we make sure that participation does not help certain groups to manipulate the aid for their own benefit? How can classic beneficiary selection processes, based on the vulnerability of individuals, be reconciled with collective group survival strategies?
- Security. How can we make sure the people involved and participating in the aid process are not subject to human-rights violations or to another form of segregation or aggression as a consequence of participation?

It is to answer these questions and hypotheses that the research team developed a research method – both theoretical and practical – that takes into account the perspectives of different stakeholders: local and national NGOs, international organisations, government, Community Based Organisations (CBOs) and affected populations.

### 1.2.3 Questions related specifically to Guinea

Having examined the refugee situation and humanitarian programmes in Guinea, the research team developed the following further questions specific to the local context.

#### Coordination and participation

- To what extent do coordination efforts enhance the participation and coordination of actors, including local organisations, and of the affected populations? How is this presently achieved?
- To what extent can co-CBOs and affected populations, ves of different stakeholders: local and national NGOs, international organisations, government, ordination of humanitarian aid look beyond the context of refugee camps in Guinea, by preparing for the refugees' return to their country of origin.
- What future is there for the refugee camps once the refugees have departed?
- How are Guinean organisations and the Guinean State best able to participate and become involved in humanitarian relief, given the large number of international actors involved in assisting refugees?

#### Diversity of culture, ethnic affinity and nationality

- **Refugee camps** To what extent is it possible to use participatory and listening mechanisms with refugee populations, given that their origins, languages and customs are so diverse? Is there a link between effective participation and cultural homogeneity?
- **Refugees and Guineans** What effect does participation have on programmes that involve both refugees (in camps and in villages) and the Guinean population? Are there any specific advantages or constraints to be taken into account?
- **Cultural constraints** How does language, religion, conflict resolution and ethnic origin. affect participation and, in turn, humanitarian action?
- **Conflict** In what way do the causes of the conflict affect participation, such as motivation, pertinence and relevance of using participatory techniques?

- **Community** Just how far can the concept of community be taken into account when dealing with heterogeneous groups?

#### Time and sustainability

- What differences should be taken into account when working with different categories of refugees, for example, refugees in permanent camps, in transit centres, in towns (Conakry, Kissidougou, N'zérékoré) and in villages?
- **Traditional social organisation and new forms of organisation in exile** How do refugees find their place in these new forms of organisation and how will communities cope on returning to their country of origin?
- Can the skills acquired by refugees in Guinea be used on return to the country of origin?

## 1.3

## Research Methodology

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### 1.3.1 Theoretical research framework

- **Definition of 'participation'** Participation is understood as all ways in which affected populations are involved in humanitarian action from passive participation to consultation to functional participation to involving local initiatives (See Table 1).
- **Definition of 'refugee' and assistance for refugees** The 1951 Geneva Convention, the main international instrument of refugee law, defines a refugee as

*“a person who is outside his/her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well-founded fear of persecution because of his/her race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion; and is unable or unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country, or to return there for fear of persecution”.*



In addition, several regional protocols<sup>1</sup> have expanded the scope of the Convention. The 1951 Convention outlines a refugee's rights, of which the most important is the principle of *non-refoulement* where countries may not forcibly return refugees to a territory where they face danger or persecution. All parties to the 1951 Convention are bound to protect basic refugee rights.

The UNHCR is mandated to lead and coordinate international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide, and to do so, the UNHCR works hand-in-hand with the governments concerned, and, with their approval, non governmental organisations<sup>2</sup>. Guinea has signed both the 1951 Convention and the 1969 Africa Refugee Convention, which relates to refugee situations in West Africa, adopted by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU).

■ **Affected populations** The affected populations taken into account in this report are first and foremost refugees and have therefore been *directly* affected by the crisis. However, as the humanitarian situation worsened, humanitarian actors were prompted to implement programmes in the villages surrounding the refugee camps (within a 15km radius). Thus, this report also takes into account village populations who have been *indirectly* affected by the crisis.

■ **Types of programmes** This report focuses on humanitarian programmes that provide assistance to refugee and IDP populations as well as programmes implemented by humanitarian actors in Guinean villages surrounding refugee camps.

■ **Programme analysis criteria** The project cycle phase provides a structure for our analysis: *needs assessment* (analysing the context and evaluating needs), *design* (defining objectives, results, activities, activity calendar, monitoring and evaluation criteria and indicators and hypotheses), *implementation*, and finally, *monitoring and evaluation*. Social targeting or beneficiary selection is treated separately from the needs assessment phase, given its special features.

■ **Measuring participation** In order to determine the degree of participation, this case study adopts the following scale proposed by the GRET<sup>3</sup>.

### 1.3.2 Selection of the Study Sites

The choice of study sites was based on the concentration of refugee populations (in refugee camps or otherwise), rather than humanitarian actors. Since the majority of refugees and refugee camps in Guinea can be found in Guinée Forestière, our research focused on this area and was carried out in all of the area's refugee camps.

**Table 1 Degrees of participation**

<b>7 Local initiative</b>	Affected populations ask to participate and take the initiative. Humanitarian actors extend their support.
<b>6 Interactive participation</b>	Affected populations are involved in project assessment and decision making.
<b>5 Functional participation</b>	Affected populations have a role to play in a particular activity.
<b>4 Materially motivated participation</b>	Affected populations are involved in exchange for money or payment in kind.
<b>3 Consultation</b>	Affected populations offer their opinion, but they are not involved in decision-making.
<b>2 Information transfer</b>	Affected populations supply information but do not make decisions.
<b>1 Passive participation</b>	Affected populations are informed but not heard.

The following table aims to give a brief picture of the camps covered. The criteria for selecting villages were:

- distance between village and refugee camp
- size
- accessibility.

Table 3 below sets this out.

**Table 2 Study sites and refugee camps**

Area	Refugee camp	Description
<b>Northern Guinée Forestière (Kissidougou prefecture, Albadariah sub-prefecture)</b>		
	<b>Kountaya, Télioro &amp; Boréah</b>	Created in January 2001. <b>Kountaya</b> population: approximately 8,000 (February 2004); <b>Télioro</b> population: approximately 15,800 (February 2004); <b>Boréah</b> population: approximately 9,800 (February 2004) Up until the end of 2000, large numbers of refugees were living in camps located close to the borders with Sierra Leone and Liberia. Their proximity to conflict zones made them particularly vulnerable and they had already suffered several incursions from armed groups. For this reason, the Kountaya, Télioro and Boréah refugee camps were created so that refugees could be transferred from these over-exposed border camps. The UNHCR and partners are currently implementing a voluntary resettlement programme for Sierra Leoneans.
<b>South of Guinée Forestière (Macenta, N'zérékoré, Yamou &amp; Lola prefectures)</b>		
	<b>Kouankan</b>	<b>Kouankan</b> population: over 32,000 (February 2004) The population of this camp is composed mainly of Liberian refugees. In early 2003, a programme was set up in order to relocate the refugees to the camps in Albadariah. A number of refugees agreed to move from Kouankan to Albadariah but the majority were opposed to the transfer. While the relocation programme was underway, many NGOs shut down their programmes for the main part of 2003. As of early 2004, a few NGOs are returning to Kouankan with agricultural, IGP and vocational training programmes.
	<b>Lainé</b>	<b>Lainé</b> population of approximately 32,000 (February 2004). Originally it had a capacity of 6,000 when it was created in 2000, in order to bring together populations from Nonah transit camp and from the area surrounding Macenta. The refugees arrived in three different waves: firstly, 7,000 Liberian refugees from Nonah and Macenta refugee camps; in November 2002, populations arrived from Ivory Coast; at the end February 2003, thousands of additional people, mainly women, arrived from Liberia.
	<b>Kola</b>	<b>Kola</b> population is over 6,000 (February 2004) The camp was created in September 2001. The population figures for this camp are relatively stable. The camp is composed mainly of Liberians from the same ethnic group as the local population (Guerzé).
	<b>Nonah Transit camp</b>	<b>Nonah</b> population is approximately 7,000 (February 2004) Nonah was re-opened at the end of 2002. It is officially a transit camp which currently hosts Ivoirian refugees, although many have been there for over 15 months (as of February 2004). Despite the 'transitory' nature of the camp, in many ways Nonah is very similar to permanent camps.

The research team also sought to understand participation in the context of ‘urban refugees’, in contrast to the typical refugee camp framework. For this reason, interviews were conducted with refugees living in Conakry, the capital of Guinea, and with refugee associations in N’zérékoré, as well as with humanitarian actors who support them.

### 1.3.3 Research Methods

To adapt the Global Study’s broad research methods to the specificities of Guinea, the research team adopted a multi-staged approach, as well as tools for the collection, analysis and exchange of data.

#### Study stages

- i **Two-day preparation seminar** at Groupe URD’s research centre: compilation and analysis of results of preliminary research and logistical elements.
- ii **First field research mission** (13 November–17 December 2003) collection and initial analysis of data from Conakry and northern Guinée Forestière (Kissidougou prefecture), and in Kissidougou and surrounding refugee camps, with the village population.

**Table 3 Selected vilages**

Village	Distance from refugee camp	Size	Accessibility
<b>Northern Guinée Forestière</b>			
Krimissadou	14km	Large	Good
Farawayaya	15km	Large (administrative centre)	Very poor
Boréah	3km	Medium	Good
Madina	0.5km	Very small	Good
Yomadou	12km	Large (administrative centre)	Medium
Télikoro	3km by foot, 15km by road	Medium	Poor
<b>Southern Guinée Forestière</b>			
Lainé	2km	Large (administrative centre)	Good

- iii **Second research mission** (10–21 February 2004) in southern Guinée Forestière: research in N'zérékoré and surrounding refugee camps, and in the village of Lainé.
- iv **Write-up and dissemination** A first version of the monograph was first sent to field actors for feedback, and then the Global Study Steering Group for their comments.

### Collecting information

*Secondary information* was gathered via available documentation, the internet and discussions with key informants on the situation of refugees in Guinea. Research covered the historical and contemporary issues related to the conflicts in the neighbouring countries, and sought to identify and understand the different cultures and ethnicity of the different groups directly and indirectly affected by the crises in the sub-region.

*Primary data* was collected during the two field trips via:

- Discussions and interviews held in Conakry and in the study sites with the personnel of national and international humanitarian organisations, government representatives and local authorities;
- Meetings, focus groups and individual interviews with refugee populations and villagers and with organisations that represent them.

### Analysing the data

The analysis phase took into account the results of the two research missions and secondary information. During the research missions, regular team meetings ensured that the information was synthesised efficiently. Triangulation techniques were employed. Similarly, a feedback seminar bringing together various humanitarian actors was organised at Kissidougou at the end of the first research mission and enabled actors in the field to voice their reactions to the initial conclusions of the analysis.

### The Research Team

The team that carried out this study is both multicultural (composed of British, French, South American and West African) and multidisciplinary

(management, information technology, rural economy, etc.). Several members of the team have participated in previous case studies within the Global Study programme. The different points of view that stem from this diversity, and in particular the participation of a Guinean researcher, proved to be important assets when applying triangulation techniques to observations.

### Constraints

The following elements imposed certain constraints on the research:

- The first research mission took place during a period not only during Ramadan (reduced working hours due to fasting), but also during the build up to elections (increased security measures, travel restrictions and a general atmosphere of political tension). It was also the holiday period. These factors slowed the research process and hampered access to certain key information and informants.
- Several different languages are spoken by the refugee populations. This meant that discussions with the refugees often took place with translation into and from two or sometimes three languages. This often led to lengthy meetings and reduced the amount of information gathered in the time available.
- Time involved in travelling from one region to another and from urban centres to the refugee camps limited the time spent on research itself.
- Satisfying administrative procedures and cultural traditions in order to gain access to and win the confidence of refugee populations and villages were sometimes time consuming.
- At the time of the field research, nearly all the transit centres had been closed down. The only transit camp that remained open was Nonah transit camp which closely resembles a permanent camp, given the fact that refugees have been living there for over 12 months. Our observations as regards transit centres thus remain limited.

However, the presence of a Guinean researcher and translators as well as the collaboration of certain international organisations helped counter-balance these constraints.

## 2 THE OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

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Since the early 1990s, Western Africa has been a theatre for numerous violent conflicts. The three main conflict zones, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Ivory Coast, have created millions of displaced persons, most of whom sought refuge in neighbouring countries, especially in Guinea.

Despite the variety of different nationalities, refugee and host populations belong to broadly similar ethnic groups. Indeed, the Kissi, Toma and Guerzé ethnic groups are present in Guinée Forestière, Sierra Leone and Liberia; and the Kono and Manon ethnic groups cover Guinée Forestière, Ivory Coast and Liberia. As a result, a sense of shared identity exists among individuals belonging to the same ethnic group, even though their nationality and “official” language may differ.

Each of the aforementioned countries has its own very specific history of conflict, and the ethnic, economic and political reasons for this instability are also extremely individual. Thus within each society new forms of organisation have emerged and traditions have changed.

Yet, the conflicts are highly interlocked: prominent political and military figures and economic interests, such as access to mineral resources, are common to several of the crises, as will be seen below.

## 2.1

## COUNTRY PROFILES

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### 2.1.1 Liberia

Liberia was founded in 1822 when emancipated American slaves settled on land purchased by the American Colonization Society. Prior to the arrival of the settler population, the majority of ethnic groups present in Liberia were small and fairly disparate communities. However, from independence in 1847 Liberia was ruled by the descendents of liberated slaves, creating a divide between the two communities.

A coup d'état carried out in 1980 by Samuel Doe, a member of the Krahn ethnic minority, and the subsequent assassination of President William Tolbert, further accentuated rivalry between the descendents of slaves and indigenous ethnic groups and set the scene for repeated outbreaks of violence continuing up until 2003.

Thus, in December 1989, several hundred Gio and Mano tribesmen, who had been ill treated under Samuel Doe's rule, began a rebellion in north-eastern Liberia. War raged between the NPFL (National Patriotic Front of Liberia), with Charles Taylor at its head, and other factions for seven years. The conflict in Liberia spread over into Sierra Leone as Charles Taylor lent his support to rebels in Sierra Leone known as the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), thus fuelling violence on two fronts.

In 1996, the Abuja Peace Agreement lay the foundations for presidential elections in Liberia and in July 1997, Charles Taylor came to power with 75% of the vote. However, peace did not prove enduring. In 1999, a second wave of violence broke out as the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD)<sup>4</sup>, with backing from Guinea<sup>5</sup>, launched a rebellion against Charles Taylor from the north. With the support of a second rebel group, the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), they succeeded in gaining control of four fifths of the country.



In June 2003, Charles Taylor bowed to international pressure and signed a ceasefire treaty, pending a comprehensive peace agreement. In August 2003, ECOMOG troops (West African peacekeeping mission) were deployed in Monrovia. Charles Taylor relinquished his position, indicted on charges of crimes against humanity and war crimes by the Special Court for Sierra Leone. He was also accused by the UN of having intentionally provoked conflict in Sierra Leone. ECOMOG troops were replaced by an international peacekeeping force – the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), whose role is to ensure that the peace agreement is upheld.

Over the years, high levels of insecurity have prompted large numbers of Liberians to seek refuge in neighbouring countries. Furthermore, at various stages refugees ventured to return home, only to flee a second time when violence again reached intolerable levels, especially in later years with the emergence of the LURD and the ensuing civil war. However, the presence of peacekeeping troops has encouraged many to spontaneously return home, despite the fact that skirmishes continue to affect certain regions.

### **2.1.2 Sierra Leone**

Sierra Leone was officially created when emancipated slaves from America and the Caribbean, and ‘recaptives’ (slaves freed by the British from traders after Abolition in 1807) settled in the continent in the late 18th and early 19th century. Settling in the Freetown peninsula and along the coast, emancipated slaves speaking an anglo-african pidgin known as Krio, developed an economic and political system which marginalized the indigenous populations inland. This territorial division was further accentuated by the dual status accorded to the colony: a ‘Crown administration’ for Freetown and the peninsula, and a Protectorate under ‘indigenous administration’ for the rest of the country.

Independence in 1961 was followed by six years of political instability before civil war broke out in 1967 with four successive coup d’états.

Following this classic post-independence period of military-political turbulence, Sierra Leone sank into an era of pseudo-stability. The economic situation progressively deteriorated with widespread misappropriation of State resources and the introduction of the IMF Structural Adjustment Programme.

From 1991 onwards, civil war in neighbouring Liberia began to spill over into Sierra Leone as Liberian rebel fighters took refuge in the east of the country and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) emerged. The RUF enjoyed the support of Liberia's Charles Taylor. As the RUF became well established in the north-eastern region, armed clashes forced large numbers of civilian populations to flee the country.

During the 1990s, insecurity in the provinces reached unprecedented levels, hindering access to land and prompting villagers to develop their own self-defence groups and strategies. Thus, the conflict further intensified. Since 1992, over 600,000 Sierra Leoneans have become refugees in other countries in the sub-region, in particular in Guinea. The political climate was characterised by severe instability as the country swung between military rule and coup d'état, with repeated foreign military interventions. In 1996, presidential elections brought Ahmad Tejan Kabbah to power laying the foundations for a peace agreement with the RUF. However, Kabbah was ousted from power by a military junta and armed combat escalated once more.

In 2000, a new RUF-led offensive on Freetown and the taking hostage of some 500 UN peacekeeping troops led to the strengthening of international resolve to defeat the RUF, and the strengthening of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL). Faced with military defeat and with the incentive of a national disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programme (DDR), the RUF was progressively dismantled. As peace took root in the country, preparations began for the return of the refugees.

At the time of the study, the international community remains cautiously optimistic and peacekeeping troops have begun to withdraw. Prolonged

relative stability has prompted large numbers of refugees to return spontaneously from exile. Similarly, in Guinea, the UNHCR forecasts that humanitarian aid to refugees and the voluntary repatriation programme for Sierra Leonean refugees will both terminate by mid-2004.

### 2.1.3 Ivory Coast

A former French colony, Ivory Coast declared its independence on 7 August 1960. It was ruled by Félix Houphouët Boigny until his death in December 1993. Although Houphouët Boigny's regime bore all the characteristics of a dictatorship, it did succeed in maintaining a subtle equilibrium between the sixty-odd ethnic groups present in Ivory Coast. In addition to political stability, the country underwent significant economic development, predominantly in the agricultural sector.

In December 1993, Henri Konan Bédié became president. During this period, internal tensions escalated with the introduction of the notion of *ivoirité*, or 'Ivoirian-ness', which was mainly designed to exclude Alassane Ouattara from running in the 1995 Presidential elections. An economic crisis, brought about by the devaluation of the CFA franc in 1994 and the suspension of international aid in 1998, resulted in widespread poverty. At the same time, the *ivoirité* issue continued to exacerbate social and ethnic tension, creating a divide between different communities, often along a north–south, Muslim–Christian divide.

The past few years have been marked by several important events: a military junta successfully carried out a coup d'état in December 1999; Presidential elections in 2000 were marred by violence and brought Laurent Gbagbo to power; demonstrations took place throughout the country; and finally legislative elections were boycotted by the opposition. In September 2002, clashes between various rebel groups and government troops in the northern and western parts of the country marked the beginning of civil war. Negotiations ensued but fighting continued to affect certain regions.

However, despite the peace agreement brokered in France in January 2003, rebel groups still contest certain elements of the agreement and outbreaks of violence continue to the time of writing.

Besides several thousand deaths, the extent of the Ivory Coast crisis can be measured in terms of the number of displaced persons that the insecurity has created. The total has been estimated as being as many as 1,300,000<sup>6</sup>. Since September 2002, a multitude of nationalities have flooded into Guinea from Ivory Coast, including Liberian and Sierra Leoneans refugees in Ivory Coast, Ivorians, and Guinean, Malian and Burkinabé nationals who were passing through.

## 2.2 THE HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN GUINÉE FORESTIÈRE

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By virtue of its neighbouring countries – Ivory Coast to the south-east, and Sierra Leone and Liberia to the south – Guinea, especially Guinée Forestière (the southern-most region of the country), has long been an area of considerable geopolitical tension. At the end of 2000 and early 2001, the Guinean army bombarded the ‘Parrot’s Beak’<sup>7</sup> and Guéckédou region, in an attempt to remove NPLF (Liberian) and RUF (Sierra Leone) rebels, causing large numbers of refugees who had settled in the area to flee. Diverse regional conflicts have cast a spotlight on these borders both for the Guinean population and for its neighbouring countries. Thus, Guinée Forestière has become increasingly important within Guinean government policy-making.

According to OCHA<sup>8</sup>, in October 2003, there were roughly 183,000 refugees in Guinea, compared to 66,000 in Sierra Leone, 50,000 in Liberia, 64,000 in the Ivory Coast and 43,000 in Ghana. As of January 2002, Guinea was cited by the UNHCR as hosting the largest number of refugees in Africa, with the figure given at 178,444 refugees (statistics by country, including refugees who did not benefit from UNHCR assistance)<sup>9</sup>.

At the time of publication, the refugee population situated in refugee camps in Guinée Forestière barely exceeds 100,000 and its composition reflects the levels of insecurity in neighbouring countries. Liberians currently outnumber Sierra Leoneans who gradually are beginning to return home. Ivorian refugees are a minority and are based in refugee camps in southern Guinée Forestière, in particular Nonah transit camp.

### Box 1 Population displacement in Guinea

**1990** Arrival of approximately 325,000 Liberian refugees, fleeing the civil war. Refugees settle spontaneously in frontier villages. UNHCR and NGOs set up offices in N'zérékoré and Macenta.

**1991** Arrival of Sierra Leonean refugees, fleeing civil war. Refugees settle in villages in the 'Parrot's Beak'. NGOs set up offices in Guéckédou.

**1992–1999** Ever increasing numbers of refugees over the years lead UNHCR and implementing partners to open small refugee camps along the frontiers. However, camps eventually proved to be situated too close to conflict zones.

**End 2000–early 2001** The series of attacks that were carried out on Guinée Forestière targeted both refugee camps and Guinean villages. Between September and October 2000, 200 civilians and an UNHCR employee were killed. Others were kidnapped. Guéckédou was bombarded by the Guinean army in order to expel rebels from the town. Guinean population fled north and eastwards. It was considered necessary to transfer refugee camps away from border areas.

**February–May 2001** Refugees fleeing the 'Parrot's Beak' region were transferred to refugee camps set up in Albadariah, Kissidougou prefecture.

**October 2002** Clashes between various factions in Ivory Coast prompt the arrival of refugees to eastern Guinée Forestière, including Ivoirians, Liberians and Sierra Leoneans who were refugees in Ivory Coast and Guineans in exile in Ivory Coast.

**2003** Renewed conflict in Liberia causes a new wave of refugees.

Our understanding of demographic trends in Guinée Forestière is further complicated by internal displacement. Whether for economic reasons (for example, displaced markets and job opportunities with humanitarian actors) or humanitarian reasons (since the clashes in 2000, particularly in and around Guéckédou), the Guinean population has been far from static in recent years.

## 2.3 HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

In Guinea, numerous international and national actors provide aid to the different populations affected by the humanitarian crisis. The following table gives an indication, but it is by no means exhaustive.

**Table 4 Humanitarian Actors in Guinea providing assistance to affected populations**

International Actors	
<b>UN</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)</li> <li>■ World Food Programme (WFP)</li> <li>■ Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)</li> <li>■ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)</li> <li>■ World Health Organisation (WHO)</li> </ul>
<b>Red Cross/ Red Crescent Movements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)</li> <li>■ International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)</li> <li>■ Croix Rouge Guinéenne (CRG)</li> </ul>
<b>International NGOs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Action Contre la Faim – Espagne (ACFE)</li> <li>■ Action by Churches Together/Lutheran World Federation (ACT/LWF)</li> <li>■ Centre d'Etude Canadien de Coopération Internationale (CECI)</li> <li>■ Catholic Relief Service (CRS)</li> <li>■ Centre pour les Victimes de Traumatismes (CVT)</li> <li>■ Enfants Réfugiés du Monde (ERM)</li> <li>■ International Rescue Committee (IRC)</li> <li>■ Médecins Sans Frontières – France (MSF-F)</li> </ul>
<b>Donors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO)</li> <li>■ European Union (EU)</li> <li>■ United States Agency for International Development (USAID)</li> <li>■ Japanese Embassy</li> </ul>

**Table 4 continued****Guinea Actors****The Guinean government coordinates****humanitarian action via governmental agencies**

- Bureau National de Coordination des Réfugiés (BNCR<sup>10</sup>)
- Bureau de Co-ordination de Réfugiés (BCR)
- Brigade Mixte de Sécurité (BMS)<sup>11</sup>
- The Service National des Affaires Humanitaires (SENAH)
- Comité National de Suivi de l'Action Humanitaire (CNSAH)

- Public Services**
- Prefecture Department of Health
  - Prefecture Department of Education
  - Department of Nature and the Forest
  - Service National d'Aménagement des Points d'Eau (SNAPE)

**Guinean NGOs operating in  
refugee reception areas**

- Entraide Universitaire Pour le Développement (EUPD)
- Organisation Catholique pour la Promotion Humaine, a subsidiary of Caritas Internationalis (OCPH)
- Association Développement de la Riziculture intense et du
- Today's Women International Network (TWIN)
- Organisation pour le Développement Intégré Communautaire (ODIC)
- Plan Guinée

**Refugee Associations**

- MAGE: Men's Association for Gender Equality  
(situated in Kountaya, Télékoro and Boréah refugee camps)
- CAADA: Community Action Against AIDS and Drug Abuse  
(situated in Kountaya, Télékoro and Boréah refugee camps)
- DOMPILO: This acronym in Krio means "Through unity we shall find strength"  
(present in Télékoro refugee camp)
- AVR: Association Villageoise et Réfugiée pour la confession de toilettes et de douches  
(situated in Boréah refugee camp)
- Market Association
- CBEC: Comité pour le Bien-Être du Camp (present in Nonah refugee camp)

### **2.3.1 Guinean populations in villages surrounding the refugee camps**

The district administrative office (in which all the villages in the district are represented) and various boards, including the board of elders, of women, of young people and the village chief, are generally responsible for decision making within the village. The board of young people carries the most weight in discussions and the elders act as village advisors. A General Assembly is organised for all major decisions and may call upon the opinions of villagers who have migrated to urban centres, as they are often literate and highly respected by the local community.

The villages often boast a variety of groups, either professional (such as agricultural, apiculture, hunting, market gardening groups), based on gender (for example women's agricultural groups and Tontines) or a mixture of all socio-professional categories.

Since 1990, Guinée Forestière has received wave upon wave of refugees. Their origins are diverse. The international humanitarian community, which operates via the UNHCR in Guinea, responded by setting up camps and providing protection and care for the refugees. The Guinean government was involved in this process and currently runs the refugee camps.



## **3** FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

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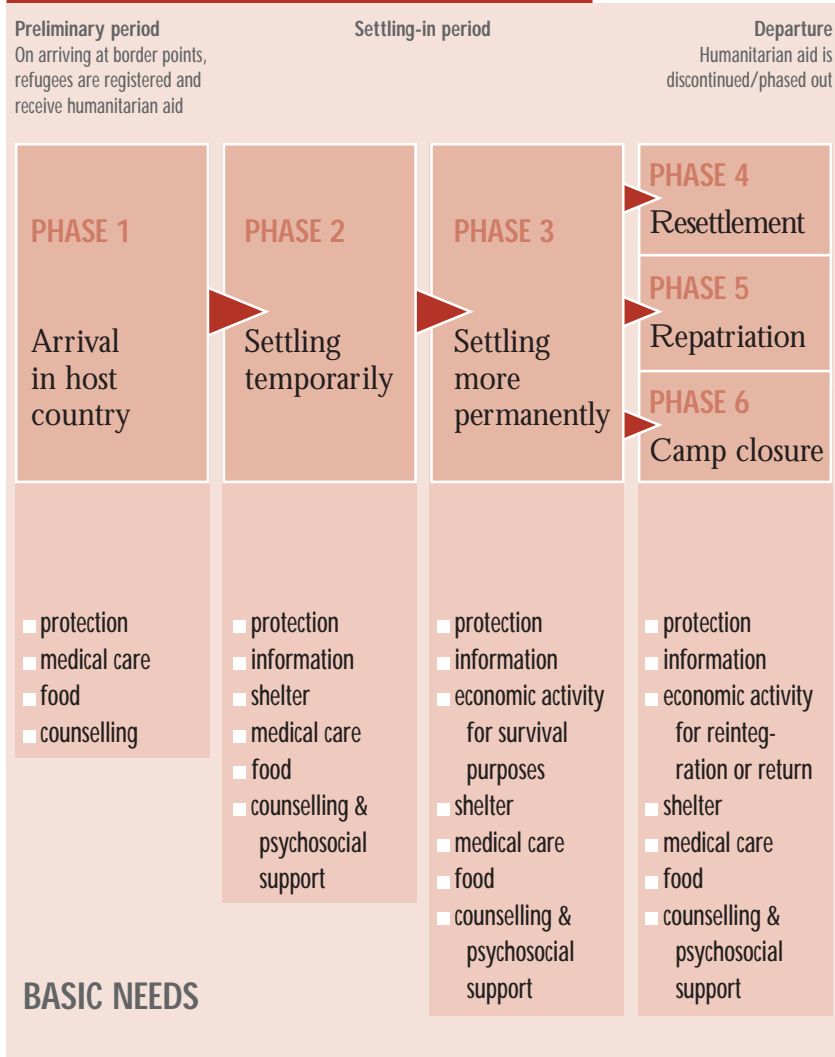
### **3.1** INTRODUCTION

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We have chosen to examine the participation of populations in humanitarian aid programmes in Guinea by looking at the various stages involved in providing assistance and protection to refugees. By no means exhaustive, the framework in Diagram 1 sets out the principal different phases in providing assistance and protection to refugees and makes it possible to explore the relationship between ‘refugees’ needs’ and ‘humanitarian response’.

Participation issues will be examined on two levels: firstly, we will look at the various phases involved in providing assistance to refugees; secondly, we will examine participation by sector. The project cycle phases provide an additional crosscutting element for our analysis.

**Diagram 1 Different phases in providing assistance and protection to refugees**



## Box 2 Description of phases

### Phase 1: Arrival in host country

The border police receive refugees at the various entry points and inform the BCR, UNHCR and NGO scouting parties. MSF and UNICEF, for example, have teams on standby in the border areas ready to provide prompt emergency relief. Refugees are provided with basic assistance, including medical care, food (hot meals) and counselling. NGOs monitor the situation to ensure that border officials respect the principle of *non refoulement*. In some cases, 'group' determination of refugee status may be considered. Refugees can be sheltered in assembly points for a maximum of 72 hours, given their proximity to the border.

Pending the arrival of UNHCR logistics, emergency relief may be provided by the local authorities (prefectures). In principle, this solution may last for up to four months, though is usually much more temporary.

### Phase 2: Temporary Settlement

According to UNHCR policy, the function of the transit centres is to provide temporary shelter, up to a maximum of six months. As such, humanitarian programmes implemented in transit centres have a short term character: basic assistance is provided, such as shelter, food and health care. In principal, humanitarian actors are not authorised to implement longer-term activities.

- a **Arrival in transit centres** NGOs are informed in advance of a convoy's imminent arrival at the transit centre and tents (communal shelters with plastic sheeting walls and a sheet metal roof with a , capacity of 50 people), sanitation infrastructure (temporary latrines and showers) and water points (wells or water bladders) are erected. Refugees receive emergency relief, including blankets, clothes and hot meals, for up to three days. During this time, NGOs make preparations for longer-term assistance for the new arrivals by, for example, registering the refugees on lists for food distribution the following month.
- b **After a few days** The camp is organised in communes – consisting of two tents, a set of latrines and showers, and a kitchen – and zones. At this point, emergency relief (hot meals for example) is progressively

**Box 2 Description of phases continued**

phased out and an organisational system emerges at a commune level. This entails drawing up refugee lists, use and upkeep of kitchens and washing areas, monitoring cleanliness and orderliness within the living quarters.

**Phase 3: Creation of a refugee camp**

Refugees are provided with assistance and accommodation on a more permanent basis in refugee camps. In many ways, these camps resemble towns, sharing many of the same characteristics. The population, sometimes as many as 30,000 people, is concentrated within a relatively reduced space with high population density compared with neighbouring villages. A high proportion of tertiary activity exists and traditional forms of organisation are eclipsed by administrative-orientated systems (Refugee Committee). An extensive network of public services is made available for the population (such as health care, education, water, sanitation, security, shelter, waste disposal).

**Setting up a refugee camp** The first step is that UNHCR asks the host country to identify a possible site for a refugee camp. However, this does not guarantee that an appropriate location will be identified immediately, as a process of negotiation with the sub-prefectures, prefectures and districts concerned is necessary.

**Phase 4: Day-to-day running of the camp**

In general, refugee camps in Guinea are under the joint administration of the UNHCR and the BCR. Local authorities, the Prefecture and sub-Prefecture, are also involved in running the camps. The refugees are represented by the Refugee Committee.

The UNHCR has set up the following systems for camp administration:

- **Field Officers and Focal Points** represent the UNHCR in the field and have a close working relationship with the refugees. They collect and centralise information in the camps and also inform the refugees about the different programmes.
- **UNHCR community services** Weekly meetings are held during which

**Box 2 Description of phases continued**

refugees, administrators and implementing partners discuss social issues, community problems and propose possible solutions.

The Bureau de Co-ordination des Réfugiés (BCR) represents the Guinean government in the camp. The BCR has close ties with local and national authorities, such as the prefectures and the BNCR. The BCR's main function is to ensure camp security, for both refugees and humanitarian actors.

The Refugee Committee represents the whole refugee population within a camp. The members of the Refugee Committee are generally elected for a one-year mandate. Elections are organised and supervised by the BCR. The Refugee Committee is generally composed of an executive board (including Chairman, Chairlady, General Secretary, Vice-Chairman, Vice-Chairlady) and ministers for different activities (for example, conflict resolution, security, distribution, education, and agriculture).

**Phase 5: Transfer to new locations**

Occasionally, deteriorating conditions in refugee camps (caused, for example, by overpopulation) or concerns about refugee protection (proximity to border areas) prompt the UNHCR to re-locate an entire refugee camp or to transfer some of the refugees to another camp.

**Phase 6: Resettlement, repatriation and camp closure**

- a **Resettlement** Resettlement is the process by which refugees are awarded permanent asylum in another country, generally in the West (for example, Britain, USA, Norway).
- b **Repatriation** Given the continuing stability in Sierra Leone and that funds for Sierra Leonean refugees are gradually being wound down, a voluntary repatriation programme for Sierra Leonean refugees is currently being implemented in Albadariah refugee camps (northern Guinée Forestière) organised by the UNHCR.
- c **Camp Closure** In general, a refugee camp is closed down when refugees leave. Humanitarian actors shut down their programmes (including those benefiting host communities) and the infrastructure in the camp is dismantled or transferred to local authorities.

## 3.2 PARTICIPATION THROUGHOUT THE VARIOUS PHASES OF PROVIDING ASSISTANCE

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### 3.2.1 Preliminary period

#### Phase 1: Arrival in host country

Whether assistance is provided by the Guinean government or humanitarian actors at the entry points, efforts to organise refugees and stimulate participation are restricted to a bare minimum.

The following arguments are put forward for this lack of participation. Refugees do not necessarily know each other and are often physically weak and/or psychologically traumatised. Many are malnourished, sick, wounded or simply exhausted. At best, they may be asked to organise themselves into groups for the distribution of hot meals and to ensure that the most vulnerable persons (for example the wounded, pregnant women and children) are identified and their needs provided for.

Many humanitarian actors indicated that the first few days after refugees have arrived at borders points is a period of acute emergency, where survival is at stake. One International NGO worker interviewed for this study stated that,

*“To try to introduce participatory mechanisms at the border points would be impractical and maybe even dangerous. Indeed, if water points and sanitation facilities are not provided immediately, the risk of disease and even epidemics is extremely high. Also the refugees have often walked for miles, are tired and traumatised. It wouldn't be very kind to ask them to assist in the building of shelters, or defining their needs. Their very survival is at stake at this point in time.”*

Frequently, village communities offer shelter and assistance to refugees. Solidarity networks form naturally and many refugees remain in the host

community for a certain length of time without officially declaring their situation to either the BCR, the UNHCR or to other humanitarian agencies.

During an acute emergency phase, the urgent nature of refugees' needs and critical protection issues have an impact on the cost/benefit relationship of implementing participatory techniques with affected populations.

Nevertheless, neighbouring communities rally together to provide assistance and their efforts have proved to be of utmost importance. It is important to ask how can the spontaneous initiatives of host communities best be taken into account and indeed supported in humanitarian programmes?

## Phase 2: Temporary Settlement

### a) Arrival in transit centres

The fact that many of the most important aspects of the transit centre's infrastructure are installed prior to the arrival of refugees inevitably limits the possibility for participation in this domain. Humanitarian actors argue that this approach is necessary in order to provide immediate assistance for refugees. However, in some cases, and in the transit centres in particular, refugees indicated that they had offered to help put up the tents, marking the beginnings of a participatory role. One refugee stated that,

*“If someone scrubs your back, you have to wash your own stomach.”*

In general, refugees are allocated tent space in order of arrival and refugees are *not* consulted during this phase. Indeed, there were some cases where families or village communities had become separated while fleeing their country, crossing the border at different entry points or at different times, and would find themselves split up in different tents. In order to rectify this situation, the Croix Rouge Guinéenne (CRG) would then have to undertake the necessary measures to reunite the whole family in one tent, either by asking other families to exchange places or by assigning the whole family to a new tent.

During this phase, difficult working conditions (for example, mass displacement, the urgent need to identify vulnerable persons and provide necessary medical assistance) render the implementation of participatory mechanisms extremely complicated. However, consulting with refugees on arrival or adopting a flexible approach for allocating tent space, in an attempt to group families and communities, enhances social cohesion within the tent and should be encouraged. According to witness accounts, failing to do so will negatively affect how close-knit the community is, how tasks are distributed and even how legitimate and representative tent leaders are. It is in this context that the cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity of refugee populations in Guinea takes on an even greater significance.

One of the first examples of consultation is the individual interview that the UNHCR conducts with refugees. This is where individual status is determined and vulnerable persons are identified, such as unaccompanied minors (UAM) and female heads of household. These interviews are crucial in determining whether a refugee is accorded special conditions when receiving shelter, and will also affect the degree and type of participation required of him/her.

#### **b) After a few days**

Even after a few days, refugees begin to participate more, especially in camp management. Two phases can be identified:

- In transit centres, the BCR asks new arrivals to select representatives (comprising of six people). These representatives are not assigned specific posts, but rather act as spokespersons for the refugees and pass on information from the BCR, UNHCR and partners to refugees. Next a more 'vertical' organisational system is set up. Each tent elects a tent leader to represent them at meetings. Refugees' requests and concerns are channelled via tent and zone leaders.
- Once refugees have received their refugee identity card entitling them to food rations, participation takes on much greater significance. It is at



this point that the Refugee Committee is set up. It is the Committee's role to act as a contact point for those responsible for camp management, and to assemble and pass on information related to the different activities carried out by humanitarian organisations to the refugees.

During this phase, initiatives for setting up their own organisation systems do not tend to originate spontaneously from within the refugee community. Refugees are asked to organise representative structures, but the composition of these structures is predetermined by humanitarian actors. Nor do refugee representatives routinely benefit from capacity building initiatives (via participatory methods), which potentially could enhance the collecting of opinions and stimulate refugee initiatives.

A genuine dialogue at this stage would lead to an improved understanding of refugee coping strategies and a greater awareness of needs that may have been overlooked, such as the need for greater privacy and intimacy for couples and families. If they had this knowledge, it would be easier for humanitarian actors to support and integrate these factors into their humanitarian programmes.

The importance of participation at this stage is further illustrated when, for a variety of reasons, refugees are obliged to prolong their stay in transit centres. This was seen in the case of Nonah transit centre. Box 3 sets out the issues refugees come up against when their stays in transit centres become more of a 'permanent solution'.

In Nonah transit centre, refugee participation proved essential for establishing decent living conditions within the camp and for ensuring a good exchange of information between partners and affected populations. Refugees express a strong need for information, especially with regards to their future. Information is regularly provided on matters concerning logistics and technical and operational planning but it appears that refugees lack information with regards to the most fundamental and important questions, such as the camp status and their long-term future.

### Box 3 When transit centres become permanent solutions: Nonah transit centre

At the time of the February 2004 field research, a large number of Ivorian refugees had been living in Nonah transit centre for 15 months. The transit centre status limits humanitarian actors to only providing for basic needs. Combined with the lack of adequate participatory mechanisms, and has had a negative impacts. The difficulties include:

- The tents are not adapted to long-term accommodation. Faced with this, refugees have tried to create or build their own private space, such as putting up partitions within the tents<sup>12</sup> or building mud houses. Families living in individual houses (houses built by previous refugee populations, makeshift shelters and, in rarer cases, houses built out of mud and bricks) become attached to their environment and prefer to remain in a situation of relative comfort (despite the limited long-term outlook) than to embark into the unknown. One refugee said,

*“(..) You see there are several families in each tent, single women, children (...) and it’s not possible to live like that for a long time (...) If couples have marital problems, there’s no intimacy (...) We have to find ways of coping ”*

- The food basket is inadequate for many refugee families. On an individual basis, many refugees look for alternative sources of income, essentially to complete or diversify the contents of the food basket. The two statements below were cited in discussions which show the need to improve food basket.

*“(..) Have you tried to eat bulgur wheat with a pinch of salt every day for fifteen months?”*  
*“(..) They give us rice, it’s up to us to find ingredients to make a sauce.”*

### Box 3 When transit centres become permanent solutions: Nonah transit centre continued

■ Refugees collect firewood, pick fruit or cultivate small plots of land in areas surrounding refugee camps, without negotiating with local populations. Their activities may cross over into farmland, sacred forests and protected woodland belonging to nearby villages and conflicts can arise if there is a lack of dialogue.

*“(...) If we (refugees) had spoken with them (villagers) before going into the forests with our machetes, we would have saved ourselves many problems (...) Later, during the meetings, they told us, “You can cut here and there (...) That is our sacred forest, you mustn’t go through it. Those are our fields, you mustn’t cut down our kola trees.” And since then, everything is fine. We just needed to talk.”*  
Young man in Nonah transit centre.

As time passes, people begin to think about the future. One man said that,

*“We begin to find out things for ourselves, where we could settle, whether the conditions are right for us to return home, where our partner may be, what the UNHCR and the Guinean government has in store for us.”*

Women, men, young people and religious groups alike, all find ways of organising themselves. For example women’s associations have initiated projects that are more typical of more permanent camps, such as soap making and tie-dye<sup>13</sup>. In a similar vein, a group of young people have set up an association CBEC (Comité pour le Bien-être du Camp).

These initiatives rarely receive the support of humanitarian actors.

Understanding and integrating ethnic and cultural dimensions specific to affected populations into humanitarian programmes should have been essential, even during this temporary phase. Indeed, failing to involve refugees in the process of allocating tent space and adopting 'prescriptive' organisation forms – Refugee Committees and tent/zone leaders – may even have heightened ethnic and cultural subtleties. Admittedly, these structures do represent a form of participation: they are extremely useful for humanitarian actors in ensuring effective monitoring and coordination of activities. It is important to ask whether these organisational structures contribute in any way to strengthening social tissue? And do they ensure that the capacities of refugees are fully exploited?

### **3.2.2 Settling-in period**

#### **Phase 3: Creation of a refugee camp**

The process currently being implemented for setting up refugee camps is highly participatory. Firstly, the UNHCR enters into negotiation with local authorities, at the Prefecture and District level. Secondly, local authorities will broach the subject with the village communities. In general, traditional leaders such as the elders council, youth council or the CRD represent the village during the negotiation process. An internal process of consultation, information and negotiation takes place in the village before a decision is reached. If the host community accepts the proposition, the authorities and villagers agree on certain commitments and a partnership agreement is sometimes signed between the UNHCR and local authorities.

Examples of participation were found to be plentiful during the installation process, however when there was a need to expand the camp, there are noticeably fewer examples of participation. Box 5 illustrates this.

The participation of host communities in setting up refugee camps obviously contributes to establishing a good relationship between refugees and villagers. Indeed, villagers often state that the solidarity they feel for the refugees explains their tolerance regarding the negative effects of the

#### Box 4 Process of negotiation: Lainé refugee camp

- When the authorities approached Lainé village, a process of consultation was initiated within the village itself. The elders, who play an advisory role, consulted with the *'enfants du village'* (people born in Lainé, currently living in urban centres) about their view on the advantages and disadvantages of hosting the refugees. One person noted that *'enfants du village' (...)* *are the village's educated children (...)* *they notice things that might escape us."*
- A delegation composed of the prefecture and government officials met with a select committee composed of the CRD, the elders council and the youth council. The local authorities then called a general assembly in order to inform the community about the proposal. The decision-making was delegated to the youth council since *"(...)* *they represent the village's future"*.
- Once the community had decided to host the refugees, an agreement was signed between the UNHCR and Lainé district, in which the villagers' conditions were laid down. The twelve clauses of the agreement covered questions such as water points and a health centre, as well as setting out the obligations of the villagers, such as the amount of land to be made available for the refugee camp, and for what length of time etc.). The elders and the young people identified to the authorities the land which could be used. Before the refugees arrived, the youth council and the elders called a second general assembly in order to inform the village of their decision and the site chosen for the refugee camp, and to discuss the advantages and disadvantages with the assistance of professionals in the capital.
- Before the refugees arrived, the elders requested that local traditions should be respected, so a sacrifice was made which was provided by the authorities. *"(...)* *We needed to ask our ancestors to protect us, to keep conflict out of the village, seeing as we were going to receive people who were fleeing war."* Only once this ceremony had been held, could preparations commence for the refugees' arrival.

latter's presence in their area. Maintaining a process of consultation and participation and continual communication with host communities, for as long as the refugee camp exists is fundamental for avoiding pitfalls.

It is important to add that a similar negotiating process was undertaken for each of the different camps with positive effects for host and refugee communities, regardless of whether the ethnicity of host and refugee population are similar or not. This leads us to the conclusion that the degree of participation is key in determining a good relationship between the two communities.

#### Phase 4: Day-to-day running of the camp

In the day-to-day running of the refugee camps, information is communicated effectively to the population via UNHCR representatives, BCR and the refugee committees. However, there is concern that this is

#### Box 5 Expanding Lainé refugee camp

■ In the first agreement that was drawn up between Lainé village and the authorities, there was no mention of providing compensation for landowners. Later, it became necessary to expand the refugee camp when the refugee population swelled to 32,000 from an initial capacity of 6,000. At this point, landowners began to negotiate financial compensation. Problems have arisen because this second process of negotiation occurred *without* involving the elders and other local leaders. According to villagers, the UNHCR spoke with individual landowners directly and with the local authorities. Several of the villagers feel aggrieved because not everyone has benefited equally from this situation, causing disharmony within village life.

Furthermore, of all the projects outlined in the agreement, only two to date have been completed, prompting the village to accuse the UNHCR of not keeping its word. One person said on the matter, “(...) *Of the twelve promises, we have only seen one so far (...) Have we been deceived?*”

not a genuine dialogue. According to refugees, the UNHCR and implementing partners have the ultimate say in how operations are run in the refugee camps.

A weekly coordination meeting for humanitarian actors also takes place in the UNHCR administrative centres of Kissidougou and N'zérékoré. Refugees are not present at this meeting and humanitarian actors are able to speak openly about problems in the refugee camps and how to resolve them. One humanitarian worker stated that,

*"(...) We can't tell the refugees that we haven't yet received their food supplies (...) just as we can't talk about the possibility of transferring a population to another location if they are present (...) There are certain subjects that are extremely sensitive and need to be discussed internally before conveying the information to the refugee population (...) for their own security."*

Even if communicating and exchanging information is essential, it is also important to establish a separate working environment for humanitarian actors, so that affected populations are protected from certain information that could endanger their security or protected from information that is susceptible to misinterpretation. However, this should not prevent humanitarian actors from aspiring to transparency in their decision-making and operational choices.

The BCR, which is a representative of the Guinean government did not feel that it was always sufficiently informed about all the activities carried out by international humanitarian actors. It would like more information, and particularly to participate in the coordination of camp activities in collaboration with UNHCR. The BCR is also demanding a greater say in how humanitarian programmes are implemented in the refugee camps.

Given that opening a refugee camp has multiple implications for the host community, it would appear that the presence of government representatives in camp administration has eased negotiations between the government and humanitarian actors, and, even more importantly,

enhanced the relationship between refugee populations and host communities.

The Refugee Committee is a central pillar within the refugee camp, and the various ministers provide a link between the Refugee Committee and other forms of organisation. Indeed, the majority of committee members also belong to other associations or groups. For example, the person who represents the elders in the committee is also head of the elders council, which includes the quarter chief, town chief and people who had been elders in their homeland.

The Refugee Committee is informed about activities that are implemented in the refugee camp, and is responsible for passing on the

#### **Box 6 Participation from the BCR's point of view**

■ According to some BCR administrators, participation would ideally mean greater involvement in coordinating humanitarian aid. The greater involvement the BCR aspires to would cover all stages of the project cycle, ie needs assessment, programme design and the opportunity to suggest improvements to programmes along the way. They underline how important it is for international organisations to support BCR initiatives and provide capacity building in terms of equipment and training for its personnel. They also believe that international organisations should show greater confidence in the BCR, for example for refugee identification, as they share the same goal, which is to provide assistance and protection for refugees.

Some BCR representatives believe that they represent an important communication link between the refugees and humanitarian actors. They are ready to listen to both refugee populations and neighbouring Guinean populations. They are responsible for refugees who choose to remain in Guinea once the NGOs have departed. Thus, they believe that it is essential that the BCR be provided with information covering all aspects of humanitarian aid, including humanitarian actors' reports, in order that they can maintain a history of humanitarian aid in the region.



information to the refugees. The Refugee Committee is present during co-ordination meetings and three representatives from each Refugee Committee are invited to the yearly planning meeting that is held in the administrative centres of Kissidougou and N'zérékoré.

For the Refugee Committee, their understanding of what participation entails is as follows:

- Being involved in preparing and implementing activities in the refugee camp, for example the yearly plan;
- Being involved in camp administration, such as the health centres (for example, helping with the cooking to ensure that the food is better adapted to the dietary habits of the patients);
- Being routinely consulted by humanitarian actors concerning the activities to be implemented in the refugee camp, not just when there is a problem;
- Being involved, along with various other committees and councils, in the process of beneficiary selection for specific programmes;
- Being supported by humanitarian actors in their own initiatives.

According to Refugee Committee members, the fact that they live in the camp and experience the same problems as the population, enables them to have a good understanding of any difficulties which may arise.

In fact, Refugee Committee members claim that for certain activities their participation guarantees maximum effectiveness. For example, one of the Refugee Committee's main roles is resolving problems between refugees and humanitarian actors, and between the refugees themselves. There are some issues that repeatedly crop up in the refugee camps such as refugees rejecting a certain type of assistance, unsatisfied demands and disputes during distribution.

Refugee Committee members, along with the elders and religious leaders, have proved to be extremely efficient in this field, partly because they are able to communicate with the refugees in their own language and due to their role in defending shared interests. The Refugee Committee ensures

that information and refugees' opinions are centralised efficiently. It intervenes where a language barrier exists, which may be hampering communication between refugees and humanitarian actors (especially in camps comprising several nationalities and ethnic groups).

However, the role of the Refugee Committee is mainly associated with channelling information and resolving conflicts. The Refugee Committee is kept informed but cannot necessarily tailor activities to best suit their needs. Certain conflicts could be avoided or contained by greater consultation with or involvement of the Refugee Committee prior to implementing a programme. Additionally, it was suggested that the role of the camp administration and the BCR setting up the Refugee Committee may actually deter refugees from initiating their own system of representation.

Attempts to involve Refugee Committees in planning revealed that their participation is limited by their restricted knowledge of the terms and tools used by international actors (for example, logical framework). Furthermore, French is the working language in Guinea, which inevitably limits the participation of refugees whose official language is English. Providing training for committee members would be a means of combating this imbalance.

#### **Phase 5: Transfer to new locations**

During the relocation programme implemented in Kouankan refugee camp (southern Guinée Forestière) some refugees were transferred to refugee camps in Albadariah (northern Guinée Forestière). Initially, the UNHCR intended to relocate the whole of Kouankan camp before closing the camp down, but the relocation programme was halted halfway.

This example highlights the importance of how information is handled in camp management, especially in the most important decisions related to the refugees' future. Participation is an essential part of a relocation process, and involves critical questions. Who wants to leave? How does one prepare for a transfer? When and how? If the transfer is poorly organised

or communication is scarce, it may have an undesired effect on beneficiary motivation and participation and in turn, on how effective and appropriate ongoing programmes are.

#### **Box 7 Kouankan, an overcrowded refugee camp with a suspended relocation programme**

■ The UNHCR decided to transfer the refugees to camps in Albadariah because Kouankan was deemed too close to the border, therefore placing the refugees at risk. However, refugees stated that, “(...) Albadariah is too far from our homes”.

In order to encourage the refugees to move, the UNHCR highlighted various advantages in moving north, such as family houses, water and sanitation services and a comprehensive resettlement programme. *UNHCR also “(...) showed us a film they had made of some of the refugees making the journey to Albadariah in order to convince us.”*

In Kouankan meanwhile, the NGOs were informed about the refugees’ imminent departure and began first to scale down and finally close their programmes. Eventually, the only NGOs left were those providing emergency relief (food, water and sanitation, medical care).

According to witnesses, the majority of refugees who had arrived in recent months in Kouankan, signed up for transfer to Albadariah, leaving the refugees who had been there longer. There are many reasons for this split. The majority of the first refugees to arrive in Kouankan were from the Mandingo ethnic group and later arrivals were from other minority groups. Furthermore, the first groups who arrived were already settled in family houses and benefited from income generating projects and agricultural programmes and they felt that their children were being well looked after in terms of education and health care.

As the above relocation process illustrates, communication plays an essential role in involving affected populations and in motivating them to sign up voluntarily for transfer. As such, refugees who had arrived most recently and therefore less established were more motivated to transfer to

### Box 7 Kouankan, an overcrowded refugee camp with a suspended relocation programme

The relocation programme lasted seven months before being suspended. After an absence of almost twelve months, NGOs began to return in January 2004. The disruptive effect of the relocation programme was most apparent in income generating projects (IGPs), especially for groups that had only just received financial grants. IGPs that managed to survive the withdrawal of NGOs and subsequent programme closure were essentially involved in commercial activities for example, (tailoring) and whose business had already been running for some time. As for the rice plantations, many plots were abandoned during 2003. In certain cases, landowners demanded a guarantee (money) from the refugees, because of the departure of NGOs. The Vocational Training programme (VTC) also ceased to operate. A sense of idleness and abandon prevailed throughout the camp. Refugees sought out other means of earning money, such as gathering and selling firewood.

another location. For refugees who had been living in Kouankan for a long time, a transfer was infinitely less attractive: families were well installed, they had sources of revenue and social groups had stabilised. All of this was to be taken away.

### 3.2.3 Departure

#### Phase 6: Resettlement, Repatriation and Camp Closure

##### a) Resettlement

The resettlement process is an extremely sensitive issue, due to the fact that the supply of available places on the programme by no means matches the demand. Refugees request more information about the programme because of the opportunity that resettlement represents for them. One refugee stated that, “(...) *Refugees should be given more information about how*

*the resettlement process works and what chance they have of getting a place. How many places are available? In which countries? What conditions must they fulfil?"*

In response to these requests for more information, humanitarian actors, especially the UNHCR, have developed a specific communication policy on resettlement. Certain information that could affect the security of targeted populations (for example, where priority is given to vulnerable populations, witnesses or victims of particular atrocities, or certain age groups) cannot be shared with refugee populations, in order to avoid negative impacts and forged applications.

The Refugee Committee asks to be consulted concerning the allocation of places, especially for validating information (such as nationality and origins of certain candidates). It was said that by a member that “(...) *We are not consulted (...) We refugees are the only ones who can actually distinguish Liberians from locals living in the camp ... and determine who should be resettled.*”

When a resettlement programme is implemented, it is essential that humanitarian actors try to communicate with as much transparency as possible. Providing information on a regular basis on application procedures, application status and the number of available places can go a long way in reducing the risk of negative effects and misunderstandings. Most importantly, the expectations of the affected populations will not be raised unnecessarily.

#### **b) Repatriation**

The UNHCR organises awareness and information campaigns in refugee camps in order to encourage the refugees to sign up for voluntary repatriation and to explain how return operations are run. Yet, refugees indicate that they have very little information on what to expect once they return to their country of origin. They would like to have much more information, particularly about such issues as the security situation in their country or home areas, or whether there are any humanitarian programmes to assist them when they arrive.

There is a certain contradiction in the way communication about repatriation is perceived by refugees and implementing partners. Information and the way it is provided are often perceived as a means of exerting pressure. For example, a refugee running a business in a refugee camp said that,

*“(...) They tell us that repatriation is voluntary but they also inform us that from a certain date there will be no more help for us here. We are already no longer selected for certain income generating projects or agricultural programmes. We don't really have any choice.”*

The voluntary nature of repatriation is called into question by refugees and they remark upon the lack of participation when drawing up the timetable. One Refugee Committee member said,

*“(...) Several messages have been distributed in the refugee camp telling us that the war is over, (...) that we will be better off at home, (...) but we refugees know what we ran away from, and what conditions will persuade us to return and we know when the time is right. Here, all these decisions are made for us.”*

Information campaigns do not cover certain subjects that are important to refugees, such as how they can continue to use their skills once they have returned and prolong any activities undertaken. Some refugees have learnt new skills since arriving in the refugee camp, either via training schemes or having worked for INGOs. They would like information on how they can put this new-found knowledge to use in the reconstruction efforts in their country. Having lost everything in their homeland, they are looking for a base from which to rebuild their lives. Some of them have received information from the organisations that they work for, but the general feeling was the generally-available information was inadequate.

Refugees, who have managed to make their small business work are understandably reluctant to give this up when the alternative is so uncertain. They are concerned about what awaits them after the date fixed by the UNHCR for the end of the repatriation programme.

One example of an agency that has attempted to assist returnees is Enfants Refugiés du Monde (ERM), an INGO which has set up numerous educational, recreational and psycho-social programmes for children in both refugee camps and villages in the area surrounding Kissidougou (Guinea). Subsequently, programmes were launched in Koidu (Sierra Leone) and animators, who have been trained by ERM in Guinean refugee camps, become involved in running programmes in Sierra Leone on their return. They already know the camp set-up, ERM's activities, and the team (including a regional programme director). This is a clear example of good practice that could be replicated in similar situations elsewhere.

Refugees request improved dialogue, or at least clarity concerning the future of projects in which they participate in Guinea. The departure of Sierra Leonean refugee families impacts upon the overall cohesion of groups benefiting from income generating projects or agricultural programmes. If some of the members choose to return, the group divides up its resources. Some groups found it impossible to continue their activities with fewer members and depleted funds. Those that remain in the refugee camps are thus penalised, lacking the necessary support to start their activities up again.

Such concerns highlight the importance of allowing refugees to actively participate in the return process. In doing so, refugees will derive maximum benefit from programmes or activities in the refugee camp, and this in turn will reinforce their ability to participate in reconstruction efforts in their own country. It is important to ask whether and how it is possible for agencies to give more thought about how best to involve refugees in reconstruction programmes being carried out in their home countries prior to their departure from the refugee camp.

### **c) Camp closure**

The closure of a refugee camp poses a number of problems for both refugees and Guinean populations. The main ones are outlined below.

- Refugees who have not yet clarified their situation could be obliged to abandon socio-economic activities altogether. In general, refugees voiced concerns as to what their options are once the camp is closed. There are concerns that there is insufficient information for those who want to settle in Guinea apart from projects benefiting urban refugees in Conakry.
- Guinean populations want to recuperate their farmland and paddy fields, and perhaps even make use of the buildings and other infrastructure left behind by the refugees such as schools, health centres, and sports fields. It is at this point that refugee-affected local populations expect humanitarian actors to honour the commitments they made during initial negotiations.
- Generally, host communities state that there is a lack of adequate information about the camp closure process. They feel that their opinions were taken into consideration during the initial stages of negotiation but since then they have been neglected and promises made have not been honoured. A village elder noted that,

*“At first, they came to talk to us, the elders, they even carried out sacrifices in our sacred forests (...) then they broke their promises (...) very few of our requests have been granted (...) we are now asking ourselves, what are they going to leave us with? What state are our lands going to be in? Will we be able to use the shelters left behind by the refugees? How are we going to keep the market going which has helped us so much? Will we be able to continue using the health centre?”*

Some humanitarian actors implement programmes for both host communities and refugees. More often than not, assistance for host communities dries up once the refugees have left. Few humanitarian actors have a policy of continuing to support these villages, via local structures or organisations carrying out environmental activities. Adopting a participatory approach for building capacity in host communities, such as setting up partnerships with Guinean actors, promotes sustainable activities



that will continue to run once the camp has closed. ERM is an example of one agency that does continue to support villages.

The lack of any clear information about what will happen to the land once the refugee camp has closed does little to encourage local populations to participate in certain programmes, such as reforestation. For example, village populations living in areas surrounding Dabola refugee camp (situated in Haute Guinée) which closed mid-2003 were not sufficiently motivated to participate in environmental programmes. Additionally, the possibility that the camp could be re-opened in the near future stifles any enthusiasm that might otherwise have existed.

#### Box 8 An example of agency good practice

■ The INGO Enfants Réfugiés du Monde (ERM) has a policy of supporting structures that are capable of continuing activities once the refugees have departed. Thus, in the village of Boodou, located in the 'Parrot's beak', ERM continued its activities following the closure of the refugee camp. The children in the region (800 inhabitants) benefit from education and recreational programmes and a local NGO, Le Monde des Enfants (MDE), based in Kissidougou, is in the process of being set up. In the medium term, ERM will hand over operations to MDE who will then operate independently.

MDE already runs the educational programmes in villages in the 'Parrot's Beak' and ERM provides support and guidance solely for the management side (administration, accountancy).

The process of camp closure illustrates only too clearly how important it is for actors to continue to implement participatory methods throughout the existence of refugee camps. A strong effort must be made to nurture dialogues initiated when setting up the camps and continually to review and expand communication strategies. Humanitarian actors currently

appear to concentrate almost exclusively on the day-to-day running of activities and do not attach the same degree of importance to the post-camp scenario as refugees and host communities.

### 3.3 PARTICIPATION BY SECTOR

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#### Basic Services

##### 3.3.1 Food distribution

If an absence of participation in defining food basket contents can be justified during an acute emergency phase, this assumption should be challenged in the more 'permanent' refugees camps. Some refugees point out that because they were not consulted when food basket contents were designed, the food is poorly adapted to their needs. The WFP argues that the difficulty in allowing refugees to participate is related to logistical and economic constraints. Food basket content still depends upon the availability of food items on the world market, and in particular on what items have been given 'in kind' by donors. Transport considerations also play their part.

Taking into account the above constraints, a lack of participation in defining food basket contents can ultimately affect what refugees decide to do with their food rations. Indeed, refugees often sell some of the food basket contents in order to buy more adapted food items, or to diversify the food basket.

In other cases, food basket contents are well adapted to specific needs. For example, much of the food distributed by the Croix Rouge Guinéenne (CRG) is produced and procured locally. The CRG does not distribute WFP produce but instead ensures its rations are consistent with WFP nutritional standards (Kcal/person/day). CRG is able to adapt the food

basket to the refugees' dietary preferences and takes into account cultural specificity.

In Kissidougou, the CRG keeps a stock of food for newly-arrived refugees who have not yet obtained their refugee identity card and therefore are not entitled to WFP food aid. These supplies are also available for emergency situations, such as refugee families who are going through difficult times (house fire, theft, illness, etc.). Although affected populations did not directly participate in the process, the fact that the food basket is put together by a Guinean organisation helps ensure that the contents are better adapted to the specific needs and preferences of the refugees. The cultural aspect, such as an ethnic affinity between Guinean populations and some of the refugee populations, can of course make a positive contribution to the provision of the most appropriate form of food aid.

Adapting food basket contents to the needs of affected populations requires consultation. However, is it possible to consult and adapt the food basket to the specific requirements of each group of refugees when there are thousands of people to be fed? Is it possible for the WFP to stock a selection of food items for different groups of refugees? And how practical would it be to manage these stocks?

Small organisations, such as the CRG, are able to remain flexible, but for international actors who rely on international policy (and donations) the question is of course far more complicated. Participatory methods can be implemented by all actors but participation often raises affected populations' expectations in terms of the capacity and commitment of humanitarian actors to adapt aid to their needs. If constraints prevent aid from being adapted, the agency in question should convey this information to refugees as transparently as possible. This may mitigate possible negative effects.

Food distribution (hot meals and food baskets) demands highly extensive logistical systems and therefore humanitarian actors usually require and request affected populations to contribute a large workforce to the distribution process. Prior to distribution, the Refugee Committee assists

implementing partners in informing refugees about the distribution timetable. This usually concerns dates and times of future distributions, and which beneficiaries will receive food on which day. Any changes to the content or quantity of the food basket can also be transmitted. Different means of communication are employed in each camp.

In Albadariah, the refugee camp radio station is an important means of communication for the UNHCR and NGOs involved in logistics, especially food distribution. Zone leaders are supplied with radios and information is broadcast at certain times of day. For example, NGOs may inform refugees about distribution days and times, whether refugees need to bring a jerrycan, and whether there are any modifications to food basket content.

Different communication systems and methods are employed by different NGOs in order to convey information to the refugees, but unfortunately they are rarely used for transferring information back from refugees to humanitarian agencies.

During the food distribution period, refugees are recruited for operational activities, such as work in the warehouse, scooping and maintaining security, and they are paid for this work. In refugee camps in southern Guinée Forestière, the Refugee Committee is involved in selecting the refugees who benefit from these short-term *contrats de collaboration*<sup>14</sup>. The selection process practises positive discrimination for women and/or vulnerable persons, as requested by implementing partners. Each month a new group of refugees is selected, thus benefiting a maximum number of people.

Some actors use participatory methods for monitoring and evaluating food aid programmes. For example, for its Post Distribution Monitoring activities (PDM), ACF-E trained a team of animators in Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) techniques, such as conducting interviews with focus groups and using problem trees. These animators produce a quarterly report based on a series of surveys carried out in the refugee

camp in order to evaluate the quality of humanitarian food aid (quantity, consumer habits and whether items are put up for re-sale). In addition, the report addresses a special theme (for example, the theme for July-September for Albadariah refugee camps was “*Sierra Leonean refugees vis-à-vis repatriation*”). The NGO provides regular training sessions in these participatory disciplines.

This particular INGO has dedicated a lot of time to setting up participatory methods, for example by organising training sessions for the animators and giving them the opportunity to put these techniques into practice. This has also helped create a close-knit team. In addition, these activities are constantly reviewed and improvements introduced where necessary. Thus, ACF-E currently boasts a team of animators who are highly skilled in participatory techniques and whose capacities are constantly being updated.

This example shows that in order to implement a participatory approach, it is essential for humanitarian agencies to set aside a budget and staff time, especially if capacity building is required. Donors need to be made aware, if they are not already, about the financial and technical investment needed to implement a participatory approach and how much time is required for setting up these activities.

### **3.3.2 Water, sanitation and shelter**

Before the refugees arrive in refugee camps or transit centres, humanitarian actors usually ensure that some basic needs are already covered. In Guinea, for example, agencies installed wells, and erected temporary shelters for groups of 50 refugees, each with a set of latrines and showers. This work was carried out by a work force provided by host communities.

In transit centres, participation is often limited for these highly technical activities, given the fact that most of infrastructure needs to be in place before the refugees arrive. In addition to the urgent nature of refugees’

needs, two other arguments are put forward by humanitarian actors to justify this lack of participation.

On the one hand, there is the question of technical expertise. It is not simply a matter of humanitarian actors delegating highly technical activities, especially if affected populations do not have the necessary skills. The decision-making process, especially during project design, mainly takes into account technical specifications rather than aspects that are important for affected populations.

On the other hand, there is the question of the cost/benefit relationship of participation. Humanitarian actors involved in highly technical sectors (such as water and sanitation) do not tend to involve affected populations in the upkeep of emergency sanitation structures. Certainly, upkeep often involves costly and hazardous substances, and handling them requires specific training. But more importantly, the refugees' stay is only temporary so humanitarian actors do not have enough time to train refugees adequately and benefit from this investment (the likelihood of return on investment is slim as refugees move to more 'permanent' facilities as soon as they are ready).

However, this process is necessarily different in more permanent settlements. When refugees arrive in 'permanent' camps, they play an important role in the implementation of projects, by building shelters, family latrines and showers. The main reason for this may be that services (shelter, latrines) are no longer communal but provided on a household basis. Indeed, the construction work is generally carried out by the refugees themselves. By building their own houses and latrines, refugees have a say (albeit limited) in the design and layout, and therefore they are more likely to feel a sense of ownership.

There are circumstances in which exceptions are made. For example, in order to reduce material costs and to speed up the process, humanitarian actors responsible for shelter programmes in Albadariah opted to recruit qualified labourers for the construction of the large number of shelters and then make them available to the refugees.

Equally, when refugees are accorded vulnerable status as specified on their refugee card, they are not required to directly participate in building their own house. Instead, NGOs ask other non-vulnerable refugees and neighbours to help out. The first people to benefit from the transfer to family shelter are vulnerable persons. They are provided with bricks and the NGOs ask other refugees to help them with the building work. The rest of the population is provided with tools but make their own mud bricks and help dig the latrines. Technical support is provided by qualified builders.

Although affected populations do participate in constructing their own houses and sanitation services, for monitoring activities and more technical tasks, such as laying foundations or roofing work, most NGOs hire experienced builders. Public buildings require an even greater technical expertise, and therefore NGOs usually sub-contract local specialised companies to build them.

This can give rise to cultural as well as linguistic complications as refugee populations may experience difficulties in understanding the instructions of Guinean builders. Also for contractors, identifying refugees with professional skills and assessing their experience requires time and resources. As a result, builders in the refugee population often find it difficult to obtain this type of work.

### 3.3.3 Health and nutrition

Affected populations participate in health care programmes in refugee camps via preventative awareness campaigns. Actors recruit animators, both refugees and Guineans, and translators, who are mainly refugees. Again, those refugees taken on receive a *contrat de collaboration*. Awareness campaigns generally cover hygiene, family planning, STD and HIV/AIDS prevention and response, etc. and take place in the camps and villages surrounding the camps.

Given that prevention and awareness campaigns are carried out directly with the target populations, Guineans and refugees, the message is conveyed in the appropriate language and tone. In addition, animators are

aware of cultural aspects that must be taken into account, such as social traditions, religious beliefs and gender roles. Although programme content may have been determined by an international agency, animators are essentially free to adapt the format and the style of communication. Refugees say that they feel more at ease discussing certain subjects with animators who are also refugees, in particular, hygiene matters, STD prevention and family planning. On this point, gender issues are also significant, as women prefer to speak with other women.

When questioned about their participation in health programmes, refugees claim that humanitarian actors could hire more refugees for medical activities, such as nurses or traditional birth attendants. *One Refugee Committee member said that,*

*“(...) We have some qualified people amongst us (nurses for example) who could be useful. Why do NGOs not value our skills? Take the health centre for example: if there were refugee nurses present alongside Guinean and expatriate nurses, patients would feel reassured that their symptoms will be understood and treated correctly. We don't necessarily feel comfortable explaining certain problems via a translator.”*

Whether humanitarian actors are able to offer refugees contracts, or *contrats de collaboration*, for this type of work depends on the availability of specialised personnel. Furthermore, humanitarian actors believe that hiring Guinean personnel is also a valid example of participation. Indeed, Guinean doctors, midwives and nurses are invariably far closer to refugee populations than expatriate workers, sometimes even sharing the same language, especially in the south of Guinean Forestière. This of course facilitates communication with patients.

Humanitarian actors occasionally rely on networks of refugee associations to conduct health awareness campaigns. This is the case for MSF and CBEC in Nonah transit centre for HIV/AIDS prevention. Involving refugee associations in this type of work however is limited due to a generalised lack of qualified health workers in the associations themselves.



Humanitarian health care interventions outside refugee camps are automatically linked to the Guinean health system. INGOs set up partnerships with the *Directions Préfectorales de Santé* and implement their programmes within existing health infrastructure, such as hospitals or health centres. Most INGOs assist in strengthening public health service capacities, either by donating medicines, equipment or strengthening human resources. Such support enables these structures to take in refugees when necessary.

On the contrary, collaboration is scarce between Guinean public health services and health centres situated inside refugee camps due to the temporary nature of refugee camp infrastructure, and the fact that, in theory, their activities will cease once the refugees have departed.

#### Box 9 CBEC (Comité pour le Bien-être du Camp)

■ “(...) As soon as we arrived in the camp we started organising activities because we realised that young people needed to take responsibility for some of the problems in the camp. The first thing we did was to go from tent to tent, talking about the importance of STD prevention, especially HIV-AIDS. We had no materials, just our hands. However, now CBEC has a team of animators, all of whom are volunteers. Every day they visit the tents, there are 117 so it takes us two months to go round all of them, explaining about STD prevention and condoms.

“We also distribute condoms to the refugees and place boxes of condoms in strategic places, such as cafés, so that they are readily available. Even if we don’t have any formal partnership with MSF, they supply us with condoms and training materials (paper, marker pens, handbooks, slides, etc.).”

Member of CBEC.

There is evidence that the needs assessment phase for health, as in other sectors, could benefit from more use of participatory techniques. Most assessments are highly technical, and revolve around the use of population census, questionnaires, epidemiological data and surveys, health screening, etc. The refugees are hardly, if ever, involved.

*“(...) Very few NGOs ask us what we want to do (...) We ask for things that they cannot give us, we have a long-term outlook and they cannot look further than twelve, maybe even six months (...) We were only supposed to be here one year! (...) It’s not realistic! (...) When are they going to let us do something for ourselves? We’ve been here since 1993!” Refugee.*

The involvement of refugees or refugee organisations (committees, associations or groups of refugees) in the design phase of programmes is extremely limited. It is often pointed out that refugees do not have the specific skills or experience (logical framework, standards, etc.) required for this task. Similarly, humanitarian actors believe that it is their responsibility to design the projects and find financing for them. Furthermore, transparency concerning available funding and resource allocation remains a sensitive issue for international humanitarian actors, and thus the number of external participants involved in programme design is limited.

Participation during the implementation phase is typically defined by offering *contrat de collaboration* with financial incentives to refugees, and hiring Guineans for specific tasks. Refugees and Guineans together contribute both a qualified labour force (carpenters, builders, animators, etc.) and manual labourers for construction work (bridges, schools, health centres, offices for humanitarian agencies, etc.)

### **3.3.4 Education**

Education programmes are heavily influenced by the specifics of a given context, such as refugees’ official language and the curriculum recognised and in use in their country of origin.

Sometimes, prior to the arrival of humanitarian education programmes, informal education activities are initiated by the refugees themselves. Qualified teachers or people with experience in this sector get together and organise classes. When NGOs with education programmes arrive,

NGOs incorporate refugee initiatives into their programmes by providing support for existing teaching groups and involving these teachers from the start, before embarking on a selection procedure.

*“(...) We arrived [in the ‘Parrot’s Beak’] in 1991. We volunteered to set up schools because we needed to find activities to occupy our children. Teachers present in the refugee community got together and organised themselves. We worked like this with no outside support for nine months.”*Teacher in Boréah refugee camp.

*“(...) Then the IRC arrived and gave us assistance. They paid the teachers, including five months backdated pay. Later, they introduced evaluations for the teachers.”*Teacher at Boréah refugee camp.

Language is of course a critical variable affecting the degree of participation in education programmes. Whereas the Guinean curriculum is in French, the official language in Liberia and Sierra Leone is English. This language barrier prevents refugee children from being integrated into the Guinean education system.

Where refugees speak the same language as local populations, such as Ivorian refugee populations living in Nonah transit centre, a stronger collaboration exists between refugees and Guinean schools. The combined efforts of village populations and local authorities are indispensable for ensuring that refugee schoolchildren are integrated as far as possible into existing schools and into the local community.

A good example of collaboration between local villages and refugee population is in Nonah. There, an agreement was reached between local authorities and the BCR that allowed refugee children to attend school in local villages, where accommodation was provided for them. Refugee children in Nonah transit centre attend secondary school in Yomou village and schools in the transit centre have adopted the Guinean curriculum. Families in Yomou provide accommodation for refugee schoolchildren who return to the refugee camp at weekends.

When schools are opened in refugee camps, the majority of teachers are refugees (teachers, Vice-Principal, Principal). These teachers are offered *contrat de collaboration* by INGOs. Their involvement in drawing up teaching programmes and a joint curriculum<sup>15</sup> for Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees was significant. Negotiation between INGOs and government authorities is underway so that qualifications will be recognised in their home countries.

Refugees and teachers share the responsibility for the management of the schools. In some, joint associations of refugee teachers and parents are set up to help in the running of the school and in order to resolve problems between teachers and pupils. Such a system is in place in Kountaya refugee camp, where the Community Teachers Association (CTA) was formed.

In education programmes, issues related to cultural specificity are highly significant and, as illustrated, language is a key factor in determining participation. Refugee populations organise themselves and set up educational activities for their children as soon as basic needs are satisfied. Unfortunately, education does not seem to be as immediate a priority for the majority of humanitarian agencies. As a result, educational programmes are often implemented well after the need for schools has emerged.

### **3.3.5 Economic activity**

Humanitarian agencies in Guinea implement a range of activities designed to support the livelihoods of target populations. Common programmes include income generating projects, support to refugee agriculture, chicken farms and market gardening.

The most popular income generating projects (IGPs) involve small business development, such as catering and crafts (hairdressers, tailors, tie-dye, blacksmiths, etc.). In general, humanitarian actors provide the equipment or financial grants to start off these activities. Financial support can take the form of a loan or donation, depending on the agency.

Beneficiaries of IGPs can apply on an individual or group basis. In some cases, beneficiaries receive vocational training before setting up their business.

The participation mechanisms used in the various economic activities are fairly standard at a needs assessment and beneficiary selection level, yet variations occur at the implementation level. During the *needs assessment* and *beneficiary selection* phases, two approaches stand out:

- **Informing refugees about the programme and application procedure** In this case, the INGOs maintain, that in terms of participation, it is the refugees themselves who come forward with their application and propose activities. In general, INGOs will then ask potential beneficiaries to form groups before handing in their applications.
- **Surveys on professional experience and ambitions** Families or individuals fill in questionnaires about their professional skills, their experience and their priorities. Humanitarian actors select beneficiaries based on information in the questionnaires. Often, selected beneficiaries living in the same zone/quarter are organised as a group.

In both cases, the final selection process of beneficiaries is carried out without their participation. According to the INGOs, the main reason for excluding refugee representatives from beneficiary selection is that it is a process in which confidentiality and impartiality are paramount. Indeed, this type of aid involves donations or loans of money, seeds and equipment and there is a risk that personal interest, power struggles or social pressure could influence beneficiary selection. In order to ensure that beneficiary selection is objective, a certain number of criteria are defined in advance.

#### **Participation of extremely vulnerable persons**

Some international actors have chosen to assist the extremely vulnerable<sup>16</sup> (elderly, disabled, female heads of household, etc.) via agricultural programmes, market gardening or income generating projects. Difficulties encountered in operating these programmes highlight the limits of this approach. Some of the beneficiaries are incapable of carrying out the jobs required to keep the economic activity up and running.

This approach casts doubt on the effectiveness of this type of programme. Common sense has to be applied to the question of which form of assistance would be most pertinent for extremely vulnerable persons, income generation projects or direct financial and/or material support. In cases where extremely vulnerable persons are able to work, it is essential to carry out a thorough and fully participatory evaluation of their capacities.

Regarding the forming of groups, refugees indicate that they prefer to choose their future colleagues themselves. Forming a group for an economic activity requires a close relationship and confidence. When refugees choose their own groups, they naturally gravitate to people they trust, who share similar interests and who are motivated to do the same activity. This means that the business is more likely to be a success.

#### **Box 10 Market gardening for extremely vulnerable persons in Boréah refugee camp**

■ This programme was originally intended for beneficiaries to carry out the work, which included clearing the land, sowing, transplanting seedlings, upkeep and harvesting the vegetables. Yet it soon became obvious that the beneficiaries were experiencing considerable difficulty in clearing the land. They were not physically capable of carrying out such demanding work, so labourers were employed to do this job.

The beneficiaries were under the impression that someone would explain to them how to transplant seedlings in rows and that they would then be able to carry out this task. However they were apprehensive as to whether they were going to be capable of doing so.

The risk is that the beneficiaries will become mere spectators for most of the tasks, rather than fully benefiting from the programme.

In addition to the fact that extremely vulnerable persons are physically incapable of carrying out heavy work, the tools distributed were considered to be of poor quality and the seeds did not correspond to their eating habits.

Conversely, when groups are composed on the refugees' behalf, disputes and absenteeism can be a problem. The time spent resolving conflicts and time wasted due to lack of motivation hampers the project's success.

Humanitarian agencies who allow refugees to form their own groups confess that they adopted this strategy having experienced numerous earlier disappointments with projects where groups were formed without consulting the refugees.

### Programme design

Programmes that implement economic activities are closely linked to the development sector and therefore the degree of participation in the design phase is relatively high compared with other humanitarian programmes.

In vocational training programmes designed to prepare refugees for economic activity, refugees play an important role in determining the choice of training course, as well as the selection of animator, the timetable, etc. As a result, training courses on offer in such programmes vary considerably in relation to the population's own interests and background (rural or urban, male or female, characteristics of the different waves of refugees etc).

*“Women can choose the training course that they want to follow and we suggest that they form a group of people with whom they want to work. They select a group leader and a trainer from the community. They decide how many days a week they want to have classes. Their participation is important because they are suffering so all the conditions must be met to ensure that they are not traumatised further. For example, the trainer must be someone that they have confidence in.”* Community Safety Initiative (CSI) worker in Télioro refugee camp.

*“Lainé refugee camp is an example of just how swiftly needs can change and how programmes must adapt. Each refugee is different;*

*each influx of refugees is different. Here, the first wave of refugees was mainly rural communities and their priorities were reading and writing. When new refugees arrived in the camp, they had completely different needs. They had technical skills and proposed tie-dye activities, soap making, among others. Some refugees were used to using telephones and sending emails! The urban women were interested in fashion and wanted hairdressers, and therefore a training course in hairstyling. The young were asking for IT classes and electrical engineering (...) Each training course that we offer responds to a request from the community. This is why some courses have closed down and other subjects have been started up.” JRS worker.*

In some programmes, tools kits are distributed to beneficiaries. However, the process of determining the composition of the tool kit reveals low levels of participation, which in turn can negatively impact the efficiency of activities later on in the project cycle.

For example, in Albadariah, tool kits were distributed for agricultural activities but refugees complained that tools were of very poor quality. Indeed, the humanitarian actor ordered the majority of tools from blacksmiths in Conakry instead of providing good quality industrial equipment, as refugees would have preferred. Some of the tools were made locally in sheet metal or aluminium and they fell to pieces fairly quickly. Refugees say *“if we had been consulted, we would have preferred to share a smaller quantity of tools amongst the groups, rather than poor quality tools.”*

Refugees naturally recognise the benefits of economic activity programmes, especially if the activity financed is a success. This encourages greater participation in the implementation phase.

#### **Implementing income generating projects (IGPs)**

Once the selection process is complete and financial grants have been awarded, most humanitarian agencies entrust the daily running and



decision-making to the beneficiaries themselves. They do however provide regular monitoring and occasionally complementary training sessions, such as accountancy and management.

### **Box 11 An example of using participatory approaches in an income-generating project**

#### **1 Establishing partnerships**

Contracts between humanitarian actors and villagers for agricultural programmes are generally set up via village authorities. Discussions are held with the authorities, who then explain the proposal and conditions to the villagers. The villagers participate on a voluntary basis. Landowners who are interested sign up on a list and beneficiaries are selected in accordance with programme requirements and technical specifications related to whether the land is appropriate for redevelopment into paddy fields or not.

Once landowners are identified, partnership agreements are signed with them. In most cases, the agency is responsible for preparing the paddy field for cultivation (often requiring substantial digging and conversion work involving large machinery), and invariably at no extra cost to the landowner. Once the work is complete, part of the paddy field is made available to the refugees. At the end of the contract, which usually lasts two years, the converted paddy field returns to the landowner.

#### **2 Converting/preparing land for paddy fields**

Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees are accustomed to converting and preparing land for paddy fields in their home countries, yet this technique is not widespread in Guinée Forestière. This makes it difficult for host communities to participate during this phase and therefore humanitarian actors naturally turned to refugees to make up the bulk of the work force. They either receive Food for Work or Cash for Work.

### Box 11 An example of using participatory approaches in an income-generating project continued

#### 3 Cultivating rice and upkeep of paddy fields

Beneficiaries, refugees and villagers all commit themselves to the work involved. If a person is not fully committed, they are replaced by someone else - the list of candidates is long. Beneficiaries are trained by experienced farmers and it is hoped that these skills will eventually boost Guinean farmers' capacities in paddy field cultivation, compared to hillside rain-fed rice which they are used to. Each group of refugees working in a paddy field selects a leader as a contact for the landowner.

#### 4 Managing paddy fields

Both the composition of the refugee group and the refugee-landowner-humanitarian actor relationship are important factors, as a paddy field functions as one single production unit. Thus decisions such as the timing of irrigation, upkeep of water channels and sowing methods must be harmonised. For example, inadequate irrigation management will deprive parts of the paddy field of water, penalising some beneficiaries; poorly maintained water channels can lead to flooding; using different farming techniques will impair the productivity of the paddy field.

*"I arrived in Boréah refugee camp from Dabola four years ago. ACF held a meeting and we were informed that we should submit our applications in groups. A group of us got together, all Liberian women, and we wrote a proposal to ACF for a catering business. They interviewed us and gave us FG170,000<sup>17</sup>. With this money we bought food in order to start up our business. It's important to work in a group for this kind of work. We share the jobs. We can stand in for each other in the cafe so we can still attend training courses in the camp. We chose this spot for our cafe because it's on a crossroads. We built it ourselves (clearing the land, designing the building, etc.) with some help from our neighbours. With a bit of determination, we*

*managed to keep going because it wasn't easy at first. But now it's working well and we've even been able to save some money to invest in better equipment (improve the premises, furniture, etc.)." Woman running a catering business in Boréah refugee camp.*

During the implementation phase, some NGOs invest considerable time and resources in promoting continuity and sustainability of these activities: training sessions are provided in transplanting techniques; regular monitoring is provided.

Economic programmes of this kind can often help forge good relationships between refugees and villagers, due in part to the numerous benefits for the villagers. Similarly, the way in which humanitarian actors and villagers make contact is important. Respect by humanitarian agencies for local authorities can pay dividends. In conclusion, the success of a programme in this sector depends largely on the participation efforts undertaken by humanitarian actors.

### **3.3.6 Socio-cultural activities**

An extensive and dynamic network of refugee associations is involved in promoting socio-cultural activities, including awareness and information campaigns, cultural and sporting events, recreational activities, etc. According to many association members, the majority were initiated by refugees not just to meet unsatisfied needs but also to create activities, and thus reduce general idleness. Thus, many refugee associations were involved in the fight against sexual abuse, STD prevention, organising awareness and information campaigns and also socio-cultural and sporting activities.

Frequently, humanitarian actors who carry out awareness and information activities rely on refugee associations. The activities carried out by refugee associations for the well-being of the refugee community complement those of humanitarian actors: In some cases, humanitarian actors collaborate by providing the necessary material for the event and often, they take advantage of these gatherings for passing on information.

According to association members, refugees approach refugee associations spontaneously and voluntarily to raise problems or ask for assistance. Some associations have set up networks of animators in zones and quarters in order to identify the most vulnerable members of their community and identify possible solutions with them to the difficulties they face. For some activities, such as awareness campaigns for the prevention of sexual abuse, members of refugee associations believe that they are best placed to carry out such activities effectively, given that they share the same language and culture.

MAGE is a refugee association which was set up in Kountaya refugee camp in October 2001. A group of men got together in order to spread the message about Gender-Based Violence (GBV), a movement initiated by IRC. Its members include both men and women who organise awareness campaigns and go into the community in order to combat violence against women. The thought behind MAGE is explained below by MAGE members;

*“IRC set up the GBV programme to fight this kind of abuse. They organised awareness and information campaigns in the refugee camps. But we thought that their messages weren’t getting through and that they weren’t effectively combating the problem. Some of this behaviour that we have to fight against is inherent in our culture. We know this behaviour well. We needed to target men who are the perpetrators. This is what inspired us to create MAGE.”*

Refugee associations look to humanitarian agencies for material, financial and training assistance in building their overall capacity, as well as to directly support their specific initiatives. They quote a local proverb, “An empty sack cannot stand up on its own.” Some volunteers reported being discouraged by their lack of resources and said that the UNHCR and INGOs do not reply to many of the proposals they submit. Members of MAGE stated that;

*“We built our offices thanks to the qualified builders amongst our members (carpenters, builders, etc.) and with support from the GBV/IRC programme, who provided us with cement.*

*“We also carry out other activities apart from awareness, such as the Gender Literacy Pilot Project (GLPP). We are going to provide adult literacy classes, (some sexual abuse is due to ignorance), and set up activities for the victims to enable them to care for themselves. We have submitted a proposal to the High Commissioner in Geneva and we’re waiting for the reply.*

*“Our biggest handicap is the lack of support from INGOs. Our activities are limited without their support. We don’t understand why they don’t support us when we are carrying out activities that complement their projects and sometimes we do their work for them.”*



## 4

## CONCLUSIONS

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As was concluded in the earlier ALNAP studies, the main lesson from Guinea is that the participation of affected populations in humanitarian action is not only feasible, desirable and beneficial, but essential. However, the degree to which participatory approaches are undertaken, in what form and with what success, remain highly dependent on three elements that are intrinsically linked:

These are,

- i **Contextual** (eg, security, access, phase of population movement, urgency of meeting basic needs, level of resources available for humanitarian programmes etc)
- ii **Institutional** (eg, the type of institution involved and whether it is local, national or international; its principles, knowledge, experience, ability and commitment of staff etc)
- iii **Demographic** (eg, the history and culture of the refugee population, length of time they have already spent in the camp or as refugees elsewhere, past structures of internal organisation etc)

## The actors

### i) National and international institutions

By accepting refugee populations within its territory, the Guinean government also accepts the responsibility to protect and assist these populations. Although the lion's share of resources is provided by the international aid community, the Guinean government is omnipresent.

United Nations (UN) agencies responsible for coordinating humanitarian action in Guinea, such as the UNHCR and OCHA, work in collaboration with the Guinean government, which is represented by the BNCR and its field network, the BCR. Local administrative structures act as mediators during negotiations with host communities.

Several coordination systems, bringing together all humanitarian actors, have been put in place by the UNHCR, focused mainly on exchanging information about activities, timetables and constraints that might hamper programme operations, etc.

Sometimes, international humanitarian actors collaborate with Guinean NGOs but examples of this remain very limited.

### ii) Refugee-based institutions

The study has explained that refugee camps in Guinea often accommodate people of different nationalities, and from several distinct ethnic and social groups. Consequently, several languages are spoken. A large proportion of refugees cannot read or write. Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that communication between international humanitarian actors and refugees can be extremely difficult, and, at times, impossible.



However, involving refugees (via the Refugee Committees, Council of Elders, religious leaders, etc.) in two-way communication and conflict resolution can be extremely effective, given their knowledge of traditional procedures and the language factor.

### iii) Individual refugees

Much of the work that has to be carried out in and around refugee camps, such as construction work or redevelopment of farmland for paddy fields, requires a sizeable labour force, both skilled and unskilled. For activities that benefit individuals and families such as building a house, refugees demonstrate functional participation. For activities that benefit the wider community, both refugees and Guineans are contracted for this work and are usually paid for their labour.

The research in Guinea highlighted the importance accorded to participation through financial incentive, especially in the implementation phase of humanitarian programmes. Different forms of financial incentive exist:

- Hiring refugees via *contrats de collaboration* and recruiting neighbouring villagers for specific tasks. Refugees and villagers thus represent both a skilled and an unskilled workforce;
- Food for Work (FFW) or Cash for Work (CFW) for clearing or improving land for agriculture programmes or market gardening, and planting trees for environment programmes;
- Paying some refugees who perform duties on behalf of the wider community, such as those who work as security guards in refugee camps, or are members of certain committees.

In these cases, the relationship between the beneficiary population and humanitarian actors is essentially economic, and involves money in exchange for work. The nature of the relationship provides no guarantee that the 'employer' will take on board a particular complaint or point of view, nor that the 'employee' will demand that his or her perspective be

taken into account. Even though participation through material incentive is included as a form of participation, questions remain as to how 'participative' it really is.

And what about those who do not participate? What can be done, for example, to ensure that urban refugees are not overlooked? In refugee camps, how can CBOs that have been set up in addition to the official committees become more involved in the issues that concern them? What purpose, if any, will these structures serve once the refugee camp has closed down?

Despite the participatory processes identified in the field, many of these questions remain unanswered, yet surface on a regular basis during focus group interviews and discussions with affected populations. Three main groups appear to have been overlooked by current participatory activities and approaches: refugees who are not living in refugee camps, refugee associations outside official committees, and traditional organisational structures.

## 4.2

## PARTICIPATION: HOW?

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### **Participation throughout the various phases of providing assistance**

When refugees arrive at border entry points, they are often physically and psychologically drained and their sense of social and ethnic 'belonging' is often severely shaken. As a result, their participation in the organisation and implementation of activities for their benefit is difficult and requires a vigorous effort. The State and local administrative structures (prefectures, sub prefectures, districts) have a major role to play in refugee well being in such situations, especially when they are in a position to provide assistance before the arrival of other humanitarian actors.

As soon as refugees have been transferred to refugee camps, they are asked to participate in camp administration, and an organisational system is proposed to them by those responsible for camp administration. The refugees are represented in the camp by the Refugee Committee, which in turn relies on a wide network of zone and quarter leaders. The systems that are set up in refugee camps to represent the refugee population have been heavily influenced by those responsible for camp administration. They differ considerably from traditional organisational structures.

During the departure period, the degree of participation is extremely low and is limited to communicating information. Programmes require communications strategies that are two-way, continuous and, most importantly, include listening mechanisms. Whether refugees are transferred to new locations, return home or offered resettlement in third countries, this phase is of the utmost importance for refugees' future prospects. It is therefore imperative to constantly check whether information is being received correctly.

### **Participation and type of programme**

For health and highly technical programmes, besides passing on information, individual beneficiaries become involved in programmes when humanitarian actors engage them in work by means of *contrat de collaboration*.

For socio-cultural and economic programmes that are implemented in refugee camps, participation occurs to a much larger extent, either through refugee associations or working groups set up by refugees and humanitarian agencies to facilitate the smooth running of the programme.

Humanitarian actors implementing agriculture and environment programmes collaborate almost inevitably with a variety of social and administrative structures in villages. Host communities tend to become involved in programmes both on an individual basis and/or through the creation of and participation on village committees.

### The incentives to work in a more participatory manner in refugee contexts

- **To improve communication, to overcome cultural and language barriers** The involvement of refugees, who are literate and who speak the languages used by humanitarian actors (English or French), has proved indispensable in establishing links between refugees and humanitarian actors. The role of the Refugee Committee and refugees engaged as animators and translators in humanitarian programmes, is key to breaking down language barriers.
- **To identify and respond to certain needs that aid programmes do not routinely provide for** Refugees set up associations, they organise activities and they request support from humanitarian actors for recreational and sporting activities and awareness campaigns that touch upon culturally specific behaviour. The members of these associations believe that humanitarian actors currently show little interest in developing programmes for these particular activities, or when they do, they are not very effective. Likewise, in circumstances where humanitarian actors with education programmes have been absent or slow to implement programmes, groups of refugees have been seen to get together in order to provide an education for their children.
- **To establish a good relationship between refugees and host communities** This study illustrates that relations between refugees and host communities, especially where access to local resources is a potential source of friction, depend to a large extent upon the procedure adopted when setting up the refugee camp. The observations from the research show that when the procedure is participative and the host community is openly involved in the setting-up process, a good relationship is quickly established. However, should this process be lacking in any way,

then conflicts emerge and programme effectiveness may suffer. However, there was little evidence to show that participation featured highly in procedures implemented later in the camp's development, such as possible expansion and camp closure, which is a significant shortcoming in current practice.

- **Synchronising with the national system for a longer-term outlook** Humanitarian actors implementing health/nutrition and education programmes usually endeavour to collaborate with public health and education services. Their goal is to prevent national systems from being overwhelmed and to compensate for the obvious increase in demand created by the arrival of refugees. The participation of existing governmental infrastructure is therefore essential in terms of continuity.
- **To promote self-reliance amongst affected populations** Several actors implement programmes that offer affected populations the opportunity to increase their self-reliance. Common interventions include IGPs, agriculture, market gardening, livestock, and vocational training programmes. IGP beneficiaries are free to choose and manage their business. Refugees sign up voluntarily for agriculture programmes. For others, their choice of training schemes are highly welcome. All of these activities involve an encouraging degree of participation.

### **The limits of participation in refugee contexts**

When discussing the lack of involvement of affected populations in humanitarian programmes, humanitarian actors raised a number of issues, of which the most important are:

- **The critical physical and psychological state in which refugees arrive at the Guinean border** The need to stabilise the condition of new arrivals is often given as the reason why beneficiary participation in this early period is so limited.

*“It would be inhumane to ask people to participate in these conditions ...”* NGO programme director

- **The limited capacity to respond to the expectations of the population** Several humanitarian actors, especially those involved in classic emergency-type interventions, raise the issue of pre-defined minimum standards, such as Sphere. In addition, humanitarian actors tend to specialise within a certain sector (health care, education, water and sanitation) or receive funding for specific programmes and so their response is often restricted to one sector.

For example, the WFP argues that it is difficult for refugees to participate in selecting the food items that they receive, because the choice depends upon what is available on the international market, and what can be transported to the area of operations. Engaging too much in discussion with refugees about their preferred choice of food items could lead to requests or expectations that are difficult or impossible to satisfy.

- **Difficulties in collaborating with Guinean NGOs and refugee associations** While it is clearly desirable for international agencies to work more routinely with local organisations, it is not always as simple as it may appear. Numerous Guinean NGOs, for example, present partnership proposals to INGOs, making the selection process more difficult. At the same time, associations or CBOs from within the refugee community also demand to be involved in humanitarian programmes.

*“We identified 118 local NGOs when we were studying the possibility of setting up a partnership with a local NGO for sanitation activities. It’s a difficult choice.”* NGO programme director.

According to international agencies, it is difficult to collaborate with these structures for two main reasons. Firstly, they often lack sufficient financial resources or expertise to carry out activities in the most important sectors, such as health, water and sanitation and nutrition.

Secondly, their management systems are regarded as being unreliable. Their way of functioning differs from that of INGOs (minimal reporting, limited knowledge of logical framework, etc.). This is not only problematic in itself, but may negatively impinge upon the ability of an international organisation to fulfil its own narrative and financial reporting obligations to its donors.

- **Shortage of skills required to implement participatory methods and tools** Several humanitarian actors who are well versed in participation issues and who recognise the advantages of implementing participatory methods and tools bemoan the fact that not enough agencies nor individuals working in emergency relief have the necessary skills to carry out these activities.
- **Demands are high** Some humanitarian actors point out whatever is offered, refugees will always demand more. In some cases, this is especially true for activities of collective interest. One NGO worker noted that, *“They only become involved if there is a financial incentive and will not hesitate to turn down an offer, if they discover a higher bidder.”*

At this point, it is interesting to note that the arguments put forward for ‘non-participation’ tend to reveal a certain wariness between humanitarian actors and affected populations which in turn limits the exchange of information.





## 5 RECOMMENDATIONS

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Implementing humanitarian programmes using participatory methods and tools is obviously a complex process. Programmes that provide support for refugees are in general extremely technical and therefore experienced operators with the necessary technical expertise are required.

The overall humanitarian response within a given camp determines the way in which affected populations will participate. This results in a very specific, operational framework, logistics being its *raison d'être*. Thus, the structure whose participation is most solicited, namely the Refugee Committee, is often modelled upon the logistical requirements of humanitarian actors (Minister for Water and Sanitation, for Distribution, etc.). In fact, numerous additional demands for participation and identification of needs that have been overlooked during the acute emergency phase will always emerge in refugee camps, once more time and care is taken to listen.

It is time to move beyond merely using participation as a tool within classic emergency relief programmes and that instead participation can be used as a means of questioning humanitarian response and to respond to the real aspirations of affected populations.

Putting this idea into operation involves:

**1) Comprehensive participatory needs assessment** Examples of needs assessments observed in the refugee camps tend to address only one sector. This is usually the sector in which the NGO conducting the assessment in question is specialised. This type of needs assessment lacks an overall vision

of the aspirations and needs of affected populations. Some NGOs have taken the leap and carry out participatory needs assessment in refugee camps, but they are still very much in the minority. This exercise has revealed a multitude of needs that have so far been overlooked. In addition, it has demonstrated the extent of available resources within the refugee population, in terms of initiatives, know-how and motivation, resources which are not currently fully utilised.

**2) Coordinating approaches** Coordination of humanitarian aid in Guinea mainly focuses on exchanging information about the operational context and details of activities being carried out. There are some examples of various humanitarian actors combining their beneficiary lists in order to prevent the same people benefiting from several different programmes, which would have penalised other refugees.

But the observations of the research team in the refugee camps reveal a need for considerably more harmonised approaches, especially regarding selection procedures for the formation of refugee working groups and how best to pay stipends, in the case of participation through financial incentives.

Humanitarian actors would benefit from extending their coordination efforts to include sharing their experiences with participatory approaches, being frank about their successes and failures, group reflection on working methods, and a collective identification of strategies designed to lead to greater involvement of beneficiary populations.

**3) Having the right staff with the right capacities** The findings of the research in Guinea suggest the need to give more thought to how best to adopt participatory approaches to mass influx refugee situations. There is a need to gain a better understanding of the context, the crisis, its origins and its impact on affected populations. This implies an investment of time - participation takes time - , and resources, but most of all, it requires experience and knowledge. It also implies that humanitarian actors should be prepared to be flexible, adapting their programmes in the face of new feedback and demands from the beneficiary population. Having the right

staff implies promoting training programmes on participatory techniques within the organisation, in addition to providing a budget for training both international and local staff. A further goal should be to try and limit high staff turnover, especially for expatriates.

**4) Improving communication systems** Certain systems for conveying information about how humanitarian operations are progressing are very effective (such as distribution timetables etc.). However, several witness accounts indicate that refugees are still frequently unclear about some aspects of the programmes in which they are involved. Some of them said that they felt they were being used to bring in resources which in the end only benefit NGO personnel.

The most important demands for additional clarity concern vulnerability criteria and beneficiary selection procedures for programmes that provide support for economic activity. Refugees would also like more transparency on certain questions, such as the reasons behind certain decisions that affect them, and on the level of available resources for activities that benefit them..

If humanitarian actors were to communicate and/or discuss the above elements with refugees more effectively, it is likely to result in selection criteria that are more easily accepted or better adapted to needs, as well as a better understanding of why decisions have been made. Refugees would also have a clearer insight into the different problems or hitches that can affect programmes.

**5) Participation and linking relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD)** Involving affected populations in decisions that affect their future is indispensable at any time, but the stakes are even higher when dealing with decisions that will have long-term implications for the population in question.

The humanitarian situation in Guinea is no longer in the acute emergency phase. Factors, such as the length of the crisis, the complexity of the repatriation operation, particularly to Sierra Leone, and the decision

of some refugees to settle permanently in Guinea, have forced humanitarian actors and the Guinean State to devise strategies with a medium and long-term outlook.

UNHCR regularly carries out 'advocacy campaigns in order to promote repatriation'. Yet, it is clear that this process is 'voluntary' only in name and the reality is that refugees in fact have very little choice but to return. The repatriation process for Sierra Leonean refugees in Guinea is currently underway. Refugees are to a large extent expected to prepare themselves for this eventuality. Many questions remain unanswered in terms of the way in which participatory processes can contribute to this exercise, for example by helping refugees prepare for the process of 'rebuilding their lives'. Nevertheless, some opportunities do exist for developing participatory approaches by involving groups of refugees who have already returned or NGOs present on the other side of the border. These opportunities are not being fully exploited.

On the other hand, for refugees who opt for the alternative of settling in the host country, a participatory strategy should be based on providing them with adequate support in their efforts to integrate into local communities, and thus reduce possible stigmatisation.

## NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> The 1969 Africa Refugee Convention adopted by the Organisation de l'Unité Africaine (OUA) which tackles problems related to refugees in West Africa; and the 1984 Latin American Cartagena Declaration drawn up by a group of Latin American politicians, university lecturers and lawyers.
- <sup>2</sup> HCR et al., Protecting refugees, A Field Guide for NGOs, UNHCR publication N° GV.F99.0.22
- <sup>3</sup> Lavigne P., N. Sellama and M. Mathieu. (1999) Les enquêtes participatives en débat. ICRA (Centre for development oriented research in agriculture) and GRET (Groupe de recherche et d'échanges technologiques), Karthala, Paris
- <sup>4</sup> The LURD, the main anti-Taylor armed movement, replaced the previous rebel movement, the ULIMO (United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia), which actively fought Taylor's troops from 1990 to 1997.
- <sup>5</sup> Human Rights Watch, De nouveau au bord du gouffre : crimes de guerre commis par le gouvernement libérien et les rebelles, HRW Report, Vol. 14, n° 4 (A), May 2002
- <sup>6</sup> Côte d'Ivoire: Humanitarian operations threatened by lack of funds, Abidjan, 4 February 2003, IRIN, C. Gramizzi and M. Damian.
- <sup>7</sup> The 'Parrot's Beak', or the Languette, is a stretch of land in Guinée Forestière which protrudes into Sierra Leone.
- <sup>8</sup> West Africa – Situation Map October 2003, OCHA Regional Support Officer – Dakar.
- <sup>9</sup> UNHCR, Africa: Facts and figures – May 2002

- <sup>10</sup> The BNCR was created in 1990 and comes under the Ministry of Internal Administration, Decentralisation and Security. It is composed of members from the Ministries of the Interior, of Foreign Affairs and of Defence. The national co-ordinator is an advisor for the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs. The Commission includes an elected body composed of three lawyers who grant asylum on a case-by-case basis. It is represented at a prefecture level and in each refugee camp by the Bureau de Co-ordination de Réfugiés (BCR) and the Brigade Mixte de Sécurité (BMS).
- <sup>11</sup> The Brigade is composed of members of the different police forces (Police et Gendarmerie).
- <sup>12</sup> Makeshift solutions, such as sheets, plastic or metal sheeting are erected within the tent in order to create a private space.
- <sup>13</sup> Tie-dye is a method of producing dyed patterns by tying string, etc. to shield parts of the fabric from the dye, commonly used throughout the West African sub-region. The fabric is then made up into clothes and household linen.
- <sup>14</sup> Refugees do not have the right to work in Guinea and, to overcome this, NGOs set up *contrat de collaboration* (collaboration contracts) with them. Two categories of contract exist. The first includes refugees who are recruited for a set length of time and receive a stipend on a regular basis. They are mainly qualified posts (teachers, technicians, animators, etc.). The second group includes those who are paid per contract and concerns manual labourers.
- <sup>15</sup> The Liberian and Sierra Leonean curriculum are similar except for the pass mark. In Liberia, below 75% is a fail, in Sierra Leone, the pass mark is 50%. The joint curriculum uses the 50% pass mark.
- <sup>16</sup> There are two main categories of vulnerable persons (according to the characteristics used commonly in refugee camps by humanitarian actors): firstly, vulnerable persons that are capable of working (young mothers, single females, victims of assault, etc.) and secondly, those that are incapable of working, or whose capacities are limited (the elderly, the physically or mentally handicapped, female heads of household with numerous dependents, etc.). The second group is referred to as extremely vulnerable persons.
- <sup>17</sup> FG170,000 is equivalent to roughly 80 euros.

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