

Reintegration Assessment Report

Oxfam GB in Liberia

March 26, 2004

I).INTRODUCTION

In preparation to work in post-conflict communities in diverse areas of Liberia, Oxfam GB undertook a study to better understand people's views about the reintegration process. The Protection Advisor and Program Officer from the Liberia office spoke to approximately sixty individuals: civilians living in their home communities, displaced persons in camps and villages, and current and ex-combatants ("XCs", which is used broadly to include anyone associated with the fighting factions, including porters, cooks, and "wives"): Service providers, especially those with experience from the previous disarmament process in 1996-1997, were also consulted.

The primary objective of the study was to identify concerns and expectations regarding reintegration – from both the assistance and protection angles- to enable Oxfam to target future programs more effectively. In particular, Oxfam is concerned not to exacerbate existing tensions between different segments of the communities in which it works. Beyond this, however, the findings will help Oxfam to program in a more conflict-sensitive manner, and to strengthen its protection approach to humanitarian crises.

II).GENERAL FINDINGS

In our discussions, the term "reintegration" was not explicitly defined.¹ Most of our interviews began by asking respondents to describe how three groups of people – individuals who remained close to "home" during the conflict, the internally displaced, and former fighters (including those who served in non-combatant capacities)- might coexist once security conditions allow for large-scale return and resettlement in Liberia. What are people's expectations? What will make the process easier? What problems are returnees, especially women, girls, and ex-combatants, likely to face? What conditions are required for reconciliation and a just peace? Although for most respondents reintegration implied a return home, a significant minority plans to resettle elsewhere. Several young ex-

¹ A 2003 DFID report exploring lessons learned from the Sierra Leone experience describes reintegration as a process "centered around the joint involvement of XCs and the civil populace in community work, meetings and dialogue, and sporting, social, and cultural activities, and on issues of economic independence and restoration of livelihoods". See *Report produced for DFID on Reintegration Activities in Sierra Leone: Reintegration Lesson Learning and Impact Evaluation, Phase 2 Report*, by Simon Arthy (April 2003) on page 5. Hereafter referred to as the "DFID Report".

combatants, especially those who cannot trace their parents, intend to remain in urban centers after disarmament.² Many girls and women who served as commanders' wives will also settle apart from their families, especially if they have children themselves.

Prerequisites for Return

Through focus group and individual interviews, displaced persons identified the following prerequisites to a sustainable return (listed in order of frequency mentioned):

- A. Effective disarmament (100%)
- B. UNMIL deployment
- C. Material support for return
 - * Reintegration packages – tools, seeds, pots, tarpaulin
 - * Shelter reconstruction materials
- D. Free and fair elections
- E. Functional schools
 - * To continue education themselves
 - * To ensure that services are in place to occupy former combatants

Every displaced person interviewed said that they would not want to return home (with their families) before combatants are disarmed.

Although many men in Bong, Grand Cape Mount and Bomi Counties have made trips back to their farms since the New Year to plant crops, women and children have generally remained behind.

Reintegration issues for Ex-combatants (“XCs” including individuals associated with the fighting forces)

1. Lessons learned from the 1996-1997 experience (shared by service providers working in Liberia at that time)

- Programs aimed only at XCs divided communities and caused considerable resentment on the part of civilians who received no special assistance. Some

² Indeed, a report by Save the Children UK notes that a quarter of the ex-combatants interviewed lived alone or shared a place with friends a few years after Liberia's previous DDRR experience, in 1996-1997. They mainly lived in urban areas or near big companies where it was easier to find contract work. See *When Children Affected By War Go Home: Lessons Learned from Liberia*, by Krijn Peters (2003) on page 95-96. Hereafter referred to as the "Save UK Report".

former fighters who received skills through such programs could not support themselves and were easily tempted to return to arms again when the opportunity arose. Although the disconnect between market needs and skills provided was largely to blame, some respondents said that communities sometimes refused to patronize the businesses run by XCs.

- Skills training programs were often too short-term to ensure sustainability. Children, especially, suffered the most from the lack of long-term funding. A social worker from Don Bosco stated that children who opted for education programs tended to stay in school, but children who received vocational training did not have enough time to develop strong enough skills to provide the necessary independence to break ties with their commanders.
- Commanders retained power through participating in the “ex-combatants only” programs and sometimes even served as spokesmen for community-level projects. This reinforced the existing command structure and facilitated the remobilization of former fighters.
- Too little effort was made to “sensitize” communities about the importance of accepting children associated with the fighting forces (CAFF) back home. As a result many youth did not feel they could return and remained with their units for protection. The children who tried to return but faced rejection by their families – especially those involved with the Small Boys’ Unit or the Wild Geese militia – quickly rejoined the combatants when fighting resumed.

2. Community acceptance of XCs from the perspective of the civilian populace

The most frequent comment expressed by civilians regarding the return of former fighters was that the success of combatants’ reintegration depended on their current behavior. If people aim to become productive members of society, the majority of respondents expressed a willingness to forgive the past, if not to forget. At the same time, many emphasized the need for “peace building activities” to assist with this process. These activities range from livelihoods projects, skills training, and schooling to encourage victims and perpetrators to work and learn together, to facilitated dialogue and peace education. Stricter drug laws to control widespread substance abuse were also mentioned as a prerequisite to peaceful coexistence. Many respondents stated that people abducted into factions by force would have an easier time to reintegrate than those who joined willingly.

At the time of interview, civilians reported no major abuses by XCs in the parts of Bomi, Grand Cape Mount, and Nimba Counties that we visited, although extortion was common. However, women in particular complain that idle young men still vandalize property, shoot into the air, and, in Nimba, infringe upon freedom of movement by collecting small taxes from villagers headed to the market.

3. Ex combatants and combatants perspectives on community acceptance

Most of the XCs and combatants interviewed were very hopeful about prospects for acceptance upon their return. In general, respondents felt that they would face few problems because they committed no “crime” during the war. They also stressed their current good behavior and willingness to contribute meaningfully to the community. However, everyone indicated that “those who did bad things” in their own villages would be unlikely to be accepted.

With respect to frictions between members of the various factions, people did not envision any specific problems. In Cape Mount, where there are hundreds of LURD combatants waiting to disarm, soldiers said that they mingle easily with former government fighters who have returned to the area: “We can joke now and we eat together”. Several people commented that in Monrovia and Salala, commanders from opposing sides frequent markets together without creating a stir.

4. Issues specific to Children Associated with the Fighting Forces (CAFF)

Most of the children interviewed for this assessment stated they wanted to return home. However, for some “home” had shifted since the war. Quite a number of parents had relocated to urban areas, like Monrovia, during the fighting and plan to remain. Some children expressed a preference for living with other relatives.

Most were eager to return to school, although those who have already returned report frequent teasing by classmates. A 14-year old boy from Harbel said his friends provoked him by grabbing his shirt and calling him “the Charles Taylor boy”.

Some boys, especially those from difficult areas such as Rivercess, preferred staying in Monrovia to learn a trade, such as mechanics or carpentry.

As one might expect none of the children admitted to committing crimes against civilians. More interestingly however they had few concerns about reintegration because they believed they had demonstrated kindness to their neighbors throughout the conflict: “I helped old women to carry their load” (17-year old former GoL). According to a 14-year old former GoL combatant, “boys who did bad things to their ma don’t want to go home”.

Counseling of parents before return is very reassuring for children. One 17-year old at the Don Bosco interim care center said, “the people here [at Don Bosco] are talking to our parents. My father will not be vexed – he knows that the situation was that people were forced to go with the fighters”.

Still, service providers involved in the previous demobilization process acknowledged that parental rejection of their children was in fact a serious problem. A staff member from Don Bosco Homes noted that a typical father might say of his son, “I don’t want to see that boy in my life. He’s a curse to the community”. Or, “I spent a lot of money on that child, for school fees and such. Look what a waste”. Economic strain can also make parents nervous about reuniting with children likely to require extra support. One mother, when contacted recently by an NGO social worker counseling her daughter, said, “I have too many responsibilities now, I don’t think she’s going to be easily disciplined. I think you should just keep her.”

Community members and social workers highlighted the following reintegration challenges:

- Difficulty of changing a “culture of violence” overnight. Children who are accustomed to responsibility, easy money and sex will have a difficult time returning to their previous lifestyles. There is great concern that kids will create gangs to replace their previous social networks. Respondents recommended schools, skills training and recreation programs to keep kids productive.
- Lack of continuity between demobilization and reintegration. Staff from the ICCs expressed concern that the progress made with the children will be unsustainable without structures and services in place in home communities. As one woman explained, “We tell them to go to school and develop skills, but they might not have those opportunities”.
- Children considered burdens in difficult economic conditions. Helping families meet basic needs to ameliorate the mental and physical stresses of reintegration is also considered key. Almost all respondents recommended “family empowerment” - through material assistance, psychosocial support, skills training, and income-generating projects - as the framework required to promote sustainable returns for these child combatants.

Traditional authorities are considered key to facilitating the reintegration of children, because Liberian cultural values dictate that youth are of concern to the community as a whole. The town chiefs can therefore insist that a family receive their child back into the home. The Interim Care Centers (ICCs) established by various NGOs also play a critical role in easing the reintegration. At the two ICCs Oxfam visited, staff utilize a two-pronged sensitization approach targeting parents and children, to prepare both parties for the difficult conditions they are likely to face.

Encouragingly, no parents we spoke to directly said they would disown their own children. In Tubmanburg, for example, women expressed the view that “many of our children have done bad and we just need to make peace”. One father from Cape Mount said: “If my son committed crimes I would forgive him but only after he has gone to court and suffered.” Several respondents noted that fathers are generally less forgiving than mothers and would benefit from targeted sensitization activities.

5. Problems faced by women and girls associated with the fighting forces

Service providers we spoke to were concerned that girls and women, especially non-combatants, will be excluded from the official DDRR program by current policies that require commanders to provide lists of troops eligible to participate.

The reluctance of factional commanders to admit using female soldiers, and the continued usefulness of cooks and wives during peacetime, make it highly likely that qualified women and girls will be left out of the process. Other barriers to participation include the stigma attached to association with the fighting forces (women will not want to be identified so explicitly as a combatant), and lack of trust in reintegration support.

Some women and girls who do not believe they can support themselves at home will not want to become burdens to their families, especially if they have children of their own. Finally, the lack of information provided to girls and women about DDRR makes it unlikely that they will seek opportunities on their own. We met one woman whose story illustrates people’s perceived lack of options:

Nineteen-year-old Joyce³ was abducted by her husband, a commander for the Government of Liberia forces, three years ago. Since the GoL retreat to Sinoye last autumn, Joyce has been living in a displaced person's camp in Bong County. Joyce's parents are displaced from Lofa County and she has not been able to contact them. When the camps close, Joyce said she would remain with her husband because "he gives me small support and I don't want to catch a disease". Joyce was not aware that she qualified to participate in the DDRR process.

Interviewees were divided about whether girls and women who chose to return home would face significant obstacles to reintegration.

- Respondents distinguished between women who participated in active combat and those abducted to be wives or cooks. Women actively involved in fighting could be stigmatized and excluded from communal work.
- Again, the attitude of the woman or girl will influence the community's reception. An NGO worker from one area asked: "why should women enjoy immunity while other people suffered? When people were being abused they just watched." However, "if they want to be accepted, they will be".
- According to the service providers we spoke to, many girls abducted by soldiers will remain with their partners, especially if they have children. Those that return home alone, especially if they were originally abducted into a faction, can marry locally if they so choose. In Sierra Leone, many girls and women underwent "cleansing ceremonies" after which they were formally presented back into the community. However, respondents agreed that women and girls who can provide for themselves and their families will face fewer obstacles to acceptance.
- A staff member from one girls' home noted girls were more easily integrated than boys after the previous DDR process. In her experience providing skills training to former female fighters in Buchanan, she noticed that the girls often simply stayed in the city, "trading" relationships for capital to start small businesses. According to this informant, Liberian cultural practices pressure girls to leave the home as soon as they find steady boyfriends. As

³ Joyce's name has been changed to protect her privacy.

a result, “any girl involved with a fighter can go home, but she will have an internal conflict that women most times suffer”.

Interviews with XCs reveal two clear priorities: A) employment and B) education. As the potential breadwinners for their families, they are particularly concerned about having time for schooling and attending classes with much younger students.

Reintegration of IDPs

Respondents highlighted the need for coordinating reconstruction support – especially of primary shelters- with returns. Both displaced persons and community residents expressed concern about the tensions created when families are forced to share cramped spaces. In villages in Saniquelle Ma, Nimba County, for example, hundreds of displaced persons have found refuge with generous residents, but economic strain contributes to a somewhat uneasy coexistence. This concern was echoed in Cape Mount, where residents also feared that returnees might suspect the “stayers” of collaborating with LURD rebels and stealing the property of people who fled.

Vulnerable groups, such as single elderly women, persons with HIV/AIDS, or female-headed households, will require focused assistance. In Tubmanburg, women noted it is normal practice for returnee women to enter into sexual relationships with men simply to meet their basic needs. Although returnee women in particular have very few assets, all women in the community expressed interest in income generating activities.

Traditional authority, civil authority and religion: traditional chiefs, elders, and Zos

Most respondents acknowledged that years of conflict have strained the traditional authority of elders and Paramount Chiefs, who implement the Interior Administration Law in Liberia. For example, youth and ex-combatants accustomed to their independence commonly resist community work efforts, such as brushing the land.

The economic hardship produced by the war also requires children to play a greater income-generating role for the family. According to Liberian NGO staff, this dynamic has made youth more likely to refuse parental discipline. Elders, for their part, often resent taking orders from the “civil administrations” set up by the fighting factions and often run by very young men. Exceptions exist when the civil leadership is native to the village or town

– in those cases town authorities often acknowledge the status of elders by asking for advice and support.

In both Sierra Leone and Liberia, elders, social workers, teachers, church leaders, and spiritual healers (Zos) have played an critical role in facilitating reconciliation between war victims and ex-combatants through community-based counseling. In addition, boys and girls involved with the fighting forces participated in healing processes whereby they were “cleansed” of their sins and brought back into the community again. The culminating celebrations were sometimes funded by NGOs, and one child protection officer stated that they were a meaningful way to assist reintegration.

Property and Land

As in Sierra Leone, property rights issues, especially for returnees, do not appear to be a major concern in Liberia.⁴ Of the places we visited, tensions around property arose only in Tubmanburg, where a large number of LURD fighters are waiting for demobilization. During the war, LURD forces commonly took over abandoned homes and public buildings. As early as November, however, civilians started returning home to find their shelters occupied by other displaced people or soldiers. The “civil authorities” encourage returnees to allow the combatants to stay until the disarmament process begins and they can move to the barracks. This could be a more serious problem if the rate of return exceeds the pace of the demobilization process. In Sierra Leone, where a similar situation prevailed, property owners did finally request rent payment from XCs and “gaining access to short term temporary employment (through donor funded labour intensive work programmes) was cited repeatedly by XCs as being vital for them to access the necessary cash to pay this rent”.⁵

Elsewhere, community structures alleviate some of the reconstruction burden. In Cape Mount, the villages we visited have established shelter-building committees that provide free labor to vulnerable people. In Gbarpolu, voluntary organizations called “Ku” rebuild homes for women, the elderly and the disabled. From information gathered during an Oxfam assessment in Rivercess County, however, it appears that shelter construction is not considered a communal responsibility in parts of Southeastern Liberia.

⁴ DFID Report at page 16.

⁵ DFID Report at page 16.

Ethnicity⁶

Respondents stated that serious tensions exist between Mandingos and Manos in Nimba County, between Mandingos and Lormas in Lofa County, and between Krahn and the Manos/ Gios in Nimba County. Problems mainly arise from the political associations, strengthened over years of manipulation by Liberia's leaders, between specific ethnic groups and fighting factions. During the civil war that brought Taylor to power, most Mandingos were allied with opposition factions, particularly ULIMO-K. They are still collectively associated with the LURD rebel movement, although Mandingos have participated in all sides of the conflict as well as suffered its consequences.

During the Taylor regime, ethnic Krahn and Mandingos were singled out for persecution because of their association with Doe and anti-Taylor factions. For example after incursions by rebel forces in Lofa County in 1999, Mandingos were targeted by the security forces for retributive killing, torture and other forms of abuse (HRW 2000).

According to a U.S. State Department Report, "[m]any members of the predominantly Muslim Mandingo minority encountered hostility when they sought to return, after the end of the civil war, to their villages in Lofa, Bong, and Nimba counties. Many Mandingos were unable to reoccupy their homes, which had been taken over by squatters. Members of the Lorma, Gio, and Mano minorities generally held all Mandingos responsible for atrocities committed by the ULIMO-K faction during the civil war." Also, as the report notes, the lack of a functional judiciary prevented most Mandingos from seeking redress. Credible reports of harassment, intimidation, detention and murder of Mandingo civilians by government forces, especially the Anti Terrorism Unit (ATU) and members of the Lorma ethnic group, continued throughout 2002-2003.⁷

An Oxfam assessment visit to Ganta revealed extreme hostility against Mandingos whom the majority Mano population hold responsible for the devastation of their town. It is easy to conclude that Mandingos will find it difficult to return in peace.

⁶ Inter-religious tensions were not identified as a concern in any of the areas we visited. In Cape Mount, for example, communities contained both Christian and Muslim (mainly from the Vai ethnic group) residents, but respondents claimed to experience no friction on this count. The United States Department of State, however, reports that religious discrimination against Muslims has been reported in various parts of the country. See *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Liberia (2002)*, U.S. Department of State, at page 10.

⁷ State Dept. Report at page 3.

Ongoing harassment in Lofa, purportedly instigated by Mandingos from Guinea, contributes to these antagonisms. Displaced residents of the Maimu II camp in Bong County claim that neighbors who tried to return to Lofa have since come back to the camp to escape continued violence. The political dimension of this conflict is exacerbated by cultural grievances with even deeper roots. Some Lormas believe that Mandingos invaded their land and desecrated bushes and shrines held sacred by the Poro and Sande societies.⁸

In Bomi County, respondents mentioned ongoing disputes over land/resource ownership that arise between the Mandingos and Golas (Suehn Town) and the Golas and Vais (Bola Town). In southern and eastern Nimba, Gio and Mano are targeted by the Krahn-dominated MODEL forces because of their association with Charles Taylor's forces. Abuses including killings, rapes, and abduction were reported by IRIN, Amnesty International, and others throughout late 2003.⁹ In Bong County, majority Kpelle residents report that minority Mandingos will not face reprisals except the few with explicit links to LURD.

Justice and Reconciliation

In post-conflict environments, a common set of questions often arise: how to hold thousands of perpetrators accountable, while also honoring the victims and survivors, reforming institutions and changing the national and political culture to prevent the recurrence of abuse. To capture some perspectives on these issues, respondents were asked what they require, in terms of justice, to facilitate peaceful coexistence.

Over half of our respondents embraced the spirit behind Sierra Leone's Special Court, which aims to prosecute "those most accountable" for war crimes and crimes against humanity. Those individuals insisted that Charles Taylor and others who "took away Liberians' innocence" must be brought to justice. A few displaced women emphasized the

⁸ The history of Mandingos in Liberia is contested. Although most Mandingos themselves describe the Mandingo as descendants of the ruling class of medieval Mali (the Malinke), other Liberians believe that some Mandingos in Liberia are descended from forest dwellers who were enslaved by the Malinke. They argue that because the Mandingos have renounced their heritage they have no birth claim on forest land. See Stephen Ellis, "The Mask of Anarchy", page 38.

⁹ See, for example, Amnesty International's report *Liberia: the goal is peace, to sleep without hearing gunshots, to send our children to school this is what we want* (Dec. 11, 2003).

need to provide a public account of the conflict: “the people that suffered this country should be taken to court to tell us why”. Almost everyone, including XCs themselves, agreed that ordinary combatants should be forgiven after making a formal apology to their community.

The majority of rural Liberians in villages and IDP camps suggested that Liberians “let bygones be bygones”. Justice, some claimed, should remain in the hands of God: “Going to court is a waste of time. It will not bring the dead back to life”. Reasons cited for people’s resistance to criminal justice include:

- Many of the combatants were recruited involuntarily – they did not choose to participate in the fighting.
- In some areas, such as Cape Mount, participation in the war was so widespread that every family would be affected by criminal investigations.
- Establishing peace is the overarching priority – as one NGO representative said, “grabbing people to investigate them would just stir things up. If you start pulling on a tree, the tree pulls the roots – these things [investigations] can bring ugly things into society.” One community leader in Cape Mount agreed: “People accused of inciting war in other countries can be prosecuted in those countries (i.e Charles Taylor in Sierra Leone). Here in Liberia, trials of Liberians would only create further tensions.”

In Monrovia, reactions were quite different. All of the service providers we asked supported the notion of criminal justice for perpetrators of the most serious crimes. One director of a development NGO expressed his view that “everyone must be given a day in court”. Considering the fact that civil courts have been so rare in rural Liberia, it is not surprising that only urban residents would consider courtroom justice as a viable tool for sustainable peace.

Of course, not everyone felt free to comment on the issue as long as combatants still maintain a visible presence on the streets. One man from a village in Cape Mount, said: “we don’t know what should be done now. After disarmament we will know what to do. Since they still have guns we cannot answer this question.”

The relationship between reintegration and tribunal or truth commission hearings is hard to predict. According to a program officer from a children's NGO in Sierra Leone, many child fighters were afraid to enter Interim Care Centers for fear of exposing themselves to investigation by the Special Court or the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. There was considerable confusion about how the information provided by children would be used by both bodies, and whether children themselves would be prosecuted. Also in Sierra Leone, because the Truth Commission hearings actually started so long after disarmament, the impetus was lost for many XCs to provide testimony.

While opinions on this issue are diverse, both civilians and XCs are eager for a forum in which perpetrators can explain why they committed abuses, and to request forgiveness from the community.

III) RECOMMENDATIONS¹⁰

- A. General
- B. Facilitating Voluntary Return
- C. Addressing Special Needs of XCs

General

1. Plan a flexible portfolio of assistance

This will enable family members to prepare for return while continuing to keep their families in their current locations. Different people have different thresholds of security. Planned assistance needs to recognize and incorporate this in a flexible approach that can support those who want a partial return now and those who want to wait until disarmament is completed.

2. Ensure well-coordinated reintegration assistance that A) addresses the needs – especially shelter and livelihoods support- of vulnerable groups in a timely manner (i.e. immediately upon return), B) assists communities faced with an influx of XCs to minimize tensions exacerbated by the crippled economy and to prevent XCs from returning to their command structure for support, and C) ensures good coordination between different actors

¹⁰ These recommendations are drawn from recommendations made by informants to the humanitarian community. While some of them are given and being explored by relevant planning committees, sectors and organisations (e.g. provision of transport for vulnerable groups resettling to communities), it is important to note them as requests from informants.

at village level, to avoid multiple peace building, rights awareness activities in one location and a lack of activities in other locations. Use the sector meetings to coordinate this and encourage closer linking between INGOs and NNGOs in this area. The protection sector should consider establishing a specific working group on best practice in this area.

3. Plan programmes for reintegration, return, resettlement and recovery that are holistic but that recognize the different needs of different groups of the population within any given community.

It is important not to ignore the different experiences of different members of the population, nor to make the mistake that all benefits will ‘trickle down’ evenly. Programmes need to be developed that can incorporate these challenges while remaining equitable.

4. Equip field staff in basic conflict awareness and management skills.

Service providers in Liberia can enhance their core activities by training all field staff, including community mobilisers, in basic conflict management skills as well as skills for dealing with authorities, both civil and military. For example staff can be trained to identify and analyse the different types of conflict that might be present, moderate programme interventions to avoid exacerbating the conflict and in some particularly skilled cases, learn how to reduce conflict and tensions¹¹.

As the DFID report recommends, the more skilled peace-building activities might include “soft inputs” such as “facilitating workshops and courses or informal discussions for both XCs and host community, aimed at reconciliation and reintegration (including examination of root causes of the war). These are clearly complex and difficult processes potentially and remain within the scope of specialists. However ‘soft’ interventions may also include more basic inputs such as workshops and courses on individual, social and civil rights and responsibilities, and provision of ‘life skills’ [for example, conflict and stress management, communication skills, etc.] plus the promotion of sporting, social and cultural activities in the community.”¹² These are areas that fall within the scope potentially of ordinary front

¹¹ It is important to draw the distinction between the conflict management that field staff undertake routinely (e.g. in the siting of a well or other public utility) compared to the more complex and sensitive task of peace-building activities between different members of the population.

¹² DFID report at page 8.

line practitioners in a range of different sectors. Indicators may be developed to measure the extent to which humanitarian activities promote social reintegration.¹³

5. Take care not to further empower unrepresentative authorities through the practices of humanitarian agencies.

In many Liberian villages, freedom of expression is quite obviously curtailed by the military-dominated “civil authorities”. When selecting motivators and other staff members, service providers should liaise directly with community members and not self-appointed representatives.

6. As a minimum it is essential that humanitarian staff are cognizant of any discriminatory policies or practices affecting specific ethnic and religious groups. They should help mitigate such exclusion by ensuring sensitive representation of all groups in staffing and activities. Returnee monitoring should segregate data by ethnic group.

7. Ensure that interventions aimed at promoting girls’ right to education and livelihoods respond to childcare and other needs that typically prevent girls and women from participating in these programs.

Facilitating voluntary returns¹⁴

8. Assess in greater detail what beneficiaries require for a safe, dignified and voluntary return with the communities themselves. With appropriate training, field staff can conduct individual and focus group surveys to capture people’s views.

¹³ For example, we could measure the number of female XCs, wives of XCs and civilian women involved in the program.

¹⁴ The principle of voluntary return is found primarily in standards of refugee protection (as reflected in ExCom decisions and UNHCR guidelines). It stems from the principle of non-refoulement (Article 33 of the 1951 Geneva Convention) but is also relevant to situations of internal displacement (Principle 28, Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement).

Voluntariness requires:

- Freedom of Choice
 - Absence of physical, psychological or material pressure
 - Availability of choices(pull factors outweigh push factors)
- An Informed Decision
 - Access to relevant, accurate and neutral information on the situation and available options

9. Develop a clearer understanding of what the indicators for a completed disarmament are for communities.

Given the view by some¹⁵ that Liberia has never been, and never will be weapons free, it is important to clarify what constitutes an effective disarmament process for affected communities.

10. Provide opportunities for displaced persons to liaise with policy makers in government and the humanitarian community, in order to ensure that their priorities are addressed in the design of official return and resettlement policies.

11. Provide timely information on return/resettlement options to beneficiaries, especially women, children, the elderly, survivors of torture, individuals affected by HIV/AIDS and other groups that tend to be excluded from sensitization activities.

12. Ensure the provision of adequate transport for returning IDPs and XCs, especially female-headed households, the elderly, children, and the disabled.

Addressing special needs of Ex Combatants

13. Consider providing the means for community leaders - including local authorities, teachers, elders, and traditional healers - to visit cantonment and transit sites and discuss concerns that village residents and ex-combatants have about the reintegration process before returns occur.

14. Facilitate "go and see visits" for XCs to assess community response and report back to others on their reception.

15. Work with demobilizing combatants to ensure a realistic expectation of the communities receiving them, and of the conditions likely to face them.

16. Advocate for targeted sensitization activities that inform girls and women of their options with respect to the DDDR program, and use their own relationships with communities to identify girls and women eligible for support.

¹⁵ Informal communications, Liberian Human Rights organisations in March 2004

17. Advocate for DDRR policy makers to adopt a broader means of identifying eligible participants than the current commander-focused approach.

Annex A: Sources

Locations visited

Tubmanburg, Bomi County (Focus Group Discussions – mixed community representation including “civil” authority, women, chiefs/elders, teachers, and XCs)

Rick’s Institute IDP Camp, Montserrado County (Individual and Focus Group Discussions – women participants in an agricultural program, youth, and teachers)

Don Bosco Homes, Sinkor, Monrovia (Individual Discussions – XCs and service providers)

Maimu II IDP Camp, Bong County (Individual Discussions – teachers, students, and parents)

Saniquele District, Nimba County (Individual and Focus Group discussions – NGO staff, displaced individuals, chiefs/elders, women, and men)

Prokpa District, Grand Cape Mount County (Individual and Focus Group discussions – XCs, including children, women, men, chiefs/elders)

Samaritan’s Purse, Paynesville, Monrovia (Individual Discussions – XCs and service providers)

Monrovia (Individual Discussions – service providers)

Annex B: Reintegration Assessment Questionnaire

Purpose: To better understand people's views about reintegration (particularly of people associated with the warring factions) so that we can target our future programs in returnee communities more effectively.

General information:

1. Name
2. Location
3. County and village/town of origin
4. Methods (past, present) of earning livelihood
5. Level of education

For all civilians:

1. What do you think will be the biggest challenges for your community when displaced people and ex-combatants start returning home?
 - a. What were the main problems after the last war for communities when people started returning home?
2. How will people view ex-combatants? Do you think it will be difficult for community members to accept them?
3. What kinds of problems will children involved with the fighting forces have? Child soldiers? Young wives/girlfriends of soldiers? Others? What would make their reintegration easier?
4. Are there any tensions between different ethnic groups at home?

5. What are the major kinds of conflict in your community? How are these conflicts resolved?
6. What do you need to feel that justice is done for the people responsible for terrible crimes during the war?

For displaced civilians:

1. Length of displacement
2. Reason for flight
3. When will you return home?
4. What are the required:
 - Security conditions?
 - Conditions of material security – i.e. access to employment, land, livelihood, education?
5. Will you have any problems getting your land or your home back?
6. What kinds of problems will women returnees face?

For ex-combatants:

1. Length of military service
2. How were you recruited?

3. What are your biggest worries about returning home?
4. How do you think your family will see you?
5. How will you relate to traditional and local authorities?
6. What about people from other factions in the war?
7. What about victims of the war – people who suffered from violence directly, or lost family and friends? Will it be a problem to live together again?
8. What do you think is necessary for community members to find peace with each other? What would help the process of reconciliation?