

## ICRC Supports Liberian Health System

"Why is the ICRC still in Liberia? There is no war anymore." I would hardly exaggerate if I said I heard this question hundreds of times since I took over the position of Head of Delegation last year. Let me illustrate our presence in Liberia by describing one of our major activities: Health.

Since the onset of the first war in 1990, the ICRC chose a public health approach to the situation. This approach helped avoid epidemics in the besieged city of Monrovia by having engineers and medical personnel work hand in hand to restore infrastructure, such as the urban water supply and electricity, as well as support the health system.

During the last war of 2003, ICRC surgical teams treated the war wounded at JFK Hospital by providing medications and specialized medical equipment. The signature of the Peace Agreement of 2003 paved the way to a new era of hope for people in Liberia.

Nevertheless, "post conflict times" are always difficult, especially for a country that endured 14 years of conflict with massive infrastructure destruction and a generation wasted. As a result, qualified medical personnel is scarce and the provision of health care is poor.

It is time to help rebuild the ailing health system of Liberia in the best possible and sustainable way. The ICRC Primary Health Program was created in response to the needs of the current environment.

In the counties of Lofa and Grand Kru, the ICRC supports 14 clinics and health centers of the Ministry of Health through well balanced programs such as the rehabilitation of buildings, coaching of medical personnel, distribution of equipment and medications, support to the immunization program and training of laboratory technicians.

The ICRC also supports the training of traditional midwives. The midwives play a

very important role at the community level in places remote from the clinics. Chosen by their communities to care for women during pregnancy and delivery, almost 300 of them have been trained in a six month course to develop their skills in antenatal care, deliveries, post partum and new born care, and to know when to refer complicated cases to the hospital.

In coordination with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and its institutional partners, the ICRC is also participating in building the capacities of the County Health Team by reinforcing its ability to plan and manage the health system. From emergency to coordinating with local authorities to increase local capacities, the ICRC adapts its interventions in the best interest of the most vulnerable.

**Riccardo Conti**  
 Head of Delegation, ICRC Monrovia

## The ICRC closes its Tracing Program

**Over the last seven years, the ICRC has reunited more than 2'000 unaccompanied children with their families in Liberia.**

Last April, the program was officially closed in the whole region. This was good news for Liberia and its neighboring countries, as it means that peace has now enabled families to communicate and be together without the help of the Red Cross.



Gbarnga, family reunion under the aegis of the ICRC, June 2000.

Thank you to all the volunteers from the National Red Cross Societies of the region and all the Tracing delegates who were so actively involved in reuniting families separated by the conflict!

### A long history of tracing in Liberia

In 1991, the first tracing activities were conducted in Liberia and in Ivory Coast. The registered children were able to be reunited with their relatives in 1994, allowing the ICRC to close the program.

However, only 2 years later, the fighting in Monrovia forced a lot of families to flee. People were separated within Liberia, but also in Ivory Coast, Guinea and Sierra Leone.

At the time, security was not guaranteed. It would have been far too dangerous to transfer people. So the ICRC offered Red Cross Messages to allow family members to stay in touch. Hundreds of Red Cross volunteers collected and distributed messages between people displaced in Liberia, and also between Liberian refugees in Ivory Coast, Guinea and Sierra Leone.

### Reunification of children with their families

When the security situation improved in 2003, the ICRC eventually started reuniting the children with their families. At the height of the tracing activities, the ICRC had 26 full time staff on the tracing program. 250 Liberia National Red Cross Society (LNRCS) volunteers were working in the tracing booths all over the country.

### Clinton and his son

"I remember the day I saw the picture of my son Larry on a poster in the street," says Clinton Wolo. "I had had been spending almost five long years just praying for him. I could not believe it when just a couple of days later the people of the Red Cross came to my house with a letter from my son. Then 'Go' he was safe! He had fled to Nigeria and he wanted to get back with us. The man asked if I agreed! of course I agreed! So he took my picture, and sent it to my son stapled to my reply."

Continued Clinton with tears in his eyes, "For years, my son and I exchanged Red Cross Messages. The situation in Liberia was still bad. And one day, the Red Cross organized his return. They traveled with him on a plane, then on a motorbike, and he came home like a President!!!"



Clinton and his son, Larry. Monrovia, March 2008.

### Beyond the reunification of children

At the time, Clinton could not afford the school fees of Larry, so the ICRC paid for it. When families were not able to offer decent conditions of living to the returned children, the ICRC had set up small scale projects to help the integration of the previously separated children.



## The ICRC pays tribute to the reunited families of Liberia, may they continue to live in peace together

All photographs courtesy of ICRC Liberia



Monrovia, in front of the ICRC delegation. Hanging of posters by Liberia National Red Cross volunteers. December 2002.



Banga, a child who had to flee his attacked home has just been reunited with his family. February 2005.



Lofa county, ICRC employee explaining the role of the tracing agency. March 2006.



Banga, children who had to flee from their homes after their town was attacked have just been reunited with their families. February 2005.



Buchanan, Robert Town village, family members reunited under the aegis of the ICRC. December 2002.



Ggarnga, family reunion under the aegis of the ICRC. June 2000.

## Lieutenant Eric Dennis: "Respect comes from education - the law of war will be taught to every soldier of the Armed Forces of Liberia"

Following the signature of the Accra Peace agreement (2003), a new Liberian army of 2'000 soldiers has been built from scratch.

The ICRC has participated in the training of the new recruits from the very beginning, by providing dissemination sessions on the law of armed conflict (LoAC).

In November 2007, the ICRC organized a week-long 'Training of Trainers' for the instructors of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL). The workshop aimed at integrating the LoAC into education and practice.

Second Lieutenant Dennis participated to this course. A couple of months after, he lectures his men on the Law of war.

### The respect you will receive comes from the one you are giving first

"I have been a soldier for more than 20 years now," explains Dennis. "Most of us never had a chance to learn about the LoAC in those times. If people committed such atrocities during the war, I believe it is because they were not educated. Respect comes from education, and it is my responsibility as a leader to train my soldiers in respecting the law, so we will never tarnish the image of our army and of our country."

Dennis is also speaking for the other trainers when he states: "We want an army of professional soldiers. An army of educated men and women who will respect the law and will only fight against combatants."

### Giving a concrete meaning to the Geneva Conventions

"We all learnt a lot during the ICRC sessions



Second Lieutenant Eric Dennis, of the 23rd Infantry Brigade of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) lecturing soldiers under his command on International Humanitarian Law (IHL).

on International Humanitarian Law (IHL). Our country has signed the Geneva Conventions and we are all bound by the law. Knowing the rules is one thing, we now want to design the training in LoAC in the most appropriate way: so all the soldiers get the knowledge and are used to respect the law at every stage of their military life," said Dennis.

After the 'Training of Trainers', soldiers will be separated into companies. Continued Dennis, "Each of the mentors ICRC trained is responsible for the teaching of LoAC to his soldiers. We want to have several sessions a year, and the teachings of the Geneva and the Hague Conventions will be fully integrated into field practice."

### The ICRC's support and advice

"We have worked with the documentation provided by the ICRC, the Conventions, the Customary Law, and on behalf of the participants to the 'Training of Trainers', I want to thank the ICRC for the quality of teaching and the documentation provided," said Dennis.

"We are building a new army and we are very exigent regarding its standards - we can only improve the knowledge we will transmit to the soldiers, so we all know exactly what is allowed and what is not," he further explained.



GENEVA CONVENTIONS. 1949  
Painting on the wall of the ICRC delegation.

In terms of dissemination of the law of war to the armed forces, the ICRC has a supporting role: to assist the military wherever possible in carrying out their responsibilities in this regard. In addition to trainings and courses, the ICRC delegates to the armed forces can also offer assistance with seminars and training programs and provide training booklets.



## ICRC health programs in Liberia

The aim of the ICRC health programs is to ensure that the victims of conflict have access to essential preventive and curative health care of a universally accepted standard.

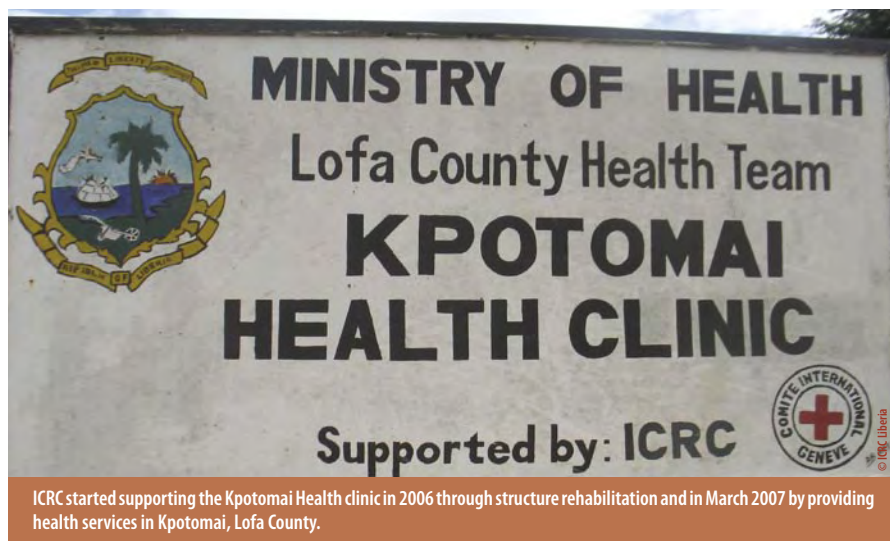
### From substitution ...

In the first years of the ICRC presence in Liberia, its medical teams were involved in 'emergency assistance.' Most of the health facilities were destroyed, the country was suffering from the dramatic shortage of qualified staff and lack of medical supplies. During the war, the ICRC gave emergency medical services at the JFK Hospital in Monrovia, thus provided much needed aid for the war-wounded.

### ... to support to the existing structures

Since November 2003, the ICRC has rehabilitated or reconstructed 14 health facilities in parts of the country that were particularly destroyed during years of war: In Lofa (Dugomai, Bondi, Kpotomai, Vezela, Popalahun, Kamatahun clinics; Lukas, and Voinjama health centres). In Grand Kru (Barclayville and Grand Cess health centres; Gblebo, Garraway, Behwan, Barclayville, Sasstown clinics.

As part of its continuous support to the health delivery system of Liberia, the ICRC donated medical, non-medical supplies and equipment valued almost USD 54'000 to the Redemption



Hospital in New Kru town, Bushrod Island (June 2008).

### Improving quality of health care through trainings

Several trainings in immunization, malaria case control and laboratory techniques have been conducted. On the job practices have also been carried out to improve quality of care at the health facilities and build the skills of staff assigned to those facilities by the Ministry of Health.

Most women in Liberia deliver their babies at home. Many walk long distances to get access to health clinics. In the wake of this, the ICRC in coordination with the Ministry of Health initiated the training of traditional midwives who frequently oversee pregnancies

in rural areas where there are no professional midwives. The training is organized in direct partnership with the Family Health Division of the Ministry of Health and the county health teams of Lofa and Grand Kru. The six-month training focuses on sharpening the skills of the midwives in the field of antenatal care, deliveries post partum and new born care.

### Extending the health care coverage in the most remote areas

As part of its commitment to the health delivery system in the country, the ICRC has started the rehabilitation of the Sasstown clinic in the remote part of Grand Kru.

The ICRC continues to assist the Ministry of Health in prevention activities supporting routine and outreach vaccination and distribution of mosquito nets. Since last year, more than 18,500 mosquito nets have been distributed in the catchment areas of the ICRC supported health facilities.



Graduation of the ICRC sponsored Training of Traditional Midwives program at Kpotomai, Lofa County, April 2008.

Until the end of the year, the ICRC will continue its support of providing essential medications and laboratory equipment to the 14 clinics/health centres in Grand Kru and Lofa and helping the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare in the payment of incentives for health workers.

## Promotion of the farmers' skills in Lofa County

### Coping with the aftermath of the war

Before the conflict in Liberia, Lofa County and to some extent Grand Kru were the main 'breadbaskets' of Liberia in terms of agricultural production. The people in these communities lived on farming (rice, cassava, beans, peanuts, and vegetables), fishing, hunting and picking (cocoa, coffee and palm oil) as their main source of income.

Years of conflict brought those activities to a standstill, and lack of maintenance let the forest, wild trees and insects take over the farms.

As more and more people started coming back to Liberia at the end of the conflict, lack of agricultural items (seeds and tools) as well as the difficulties for Cooperatives to resume their past activities, constituted substantial obstacles for returnees to engage into community farming activities again.

### The ICRC offers trainings to the farmers

Since May, the ICRC has launched training for 650 local farmers in Lofa County. They will benefit from coaching in cash crop rehabilitation, swamp development for rice production and marketing of cash crops.

Technical training on cash crop rehabilitation, both theoretical and practical, is given to farmers and working group members to ensure techniques of brushing, pruning, trimming of coffee and cocoa trees to make them more productive. Control of the crop pests and diseases is an additional activity through the provision of sprayers and pesticides.

Training on swamp and upland rice farming with practical layout of the farms is ongoing



ICRC Field Officer Magdalene Shaw training villagers on improved farming skills in Voinjama, Lofa County, April 2008.

for 35 communities in both Kolahun and Voinjama districts. Between February and April, more than 700 beneficiaries were trained on cash crop rehabilitation, and another 645 in swamp rice farming.

"The time line of the planting activities before the main rains should ensure higher productivity from the farms," explains Jean Pierre Soumah, ICRC coordinator of the program. "At the end of the training, beneficiaries will be able to manage and maintain their farms well, produce a good harvest and enable them to sell their cash crop produce for a better price. We also expect them to share their knowledge with the community, for the best interests of all," he said.

### The key role of the Gbandi Farmer Cooperative Society in Kolahun

The Gbandi Farmers Cooperative Society is providing technical support to farmers and is the major buyer of their products licensed

by Liberia Produce Marketing Cooperation (LPMC, main produce exporting company of Liberia). The LPMC is also involved in nursing young seedlings and providing cocoa, coffee and oil palm seedlings to interested farmers mainly established in the region of Voinjama.

The ICRC assisted the Gbandi Farmer Cooperative Society to improve the farming activities in the Kolahun district. In order to increase the quality of the products and then the price to be paid to the farmers, ICRC built 60 crop drying floors in eight communities targeting about 2,000 households. The organization also plans to provide a rice mill and coffee mill to ease the intensive labor of the farmers. In addition, ICRC will provide Gbandi Farmer Cooperative Society with 10'000 improved coffee seedlings.

The Ministry of Agriculture, also through the World Bank, is giving support to farmers through educational training sessions.



## LNRCs thanks the ICRC for the completion of its tracing program

**Extracts from the remarks of the Secretary General of the Liberia National Red Cross Society, Mr. Daniel S. Clarke, Jr.**

"Uniquely connected by its fundamental principles of: Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality, Independence, Voluntary Service, Unity and Universality, the Red Cross Movement constitutes one of the world's largest humanitarian actors in restoring family links and providing other humanitarian assistance to people affected by conflict and disasters.

During the difficult years covering the period 1990-2003, the Red Cross Movement, with the ICRC taking the leadership role stepped up its humanitarian operations in Liberia, Providing much needed support through assistance and



Mr. Daniel S. Clarke, Jr., Secretary General of the Liberia National Red Cross Society presenting a 'Certificate of Recognition' to Mr. Riccardo Conti, ICRC Head of Delegation.

programs of the Liberia National Red Cross. Through its cooperation framework, the Liberian Red Cross receives core cost and other technical support from the ICRC in order to provide assistance to the most vulnerable population, and for this, we, at the Liberian Red Cross, are very grateful to the ICRC.

As we have converged here today to pay this tribute to the Red Cross Tracing activities in Liberia, we acknowledge the work of hundreds of Liberia National Red Cross tracing volunteers across the fifteen counties in Liberia for a job well done. We also thank the International Committee of the Red Cross for providing financial and technical support, funding and delegates, towards the implementation of the tracing activities in Liberia."

protection activities, focusing on IDPs, refugees and residents, the wounded and sick, detainees, and children separated from their families. Importantly also, the ICRC has up to this time continued to support the development and



Certificate of Recognition offered by the Liberia National Red Cross Society to the ICRC in tribute of the tracing program. Since 2001 the ICRC has reunited almost 3000 children with their families.

## Tribute to the ICRC senior staff: Happy 10th anniversary to Lucy and Sam!

**L**ucy is one of the senior domestic staff of the ICRC in Monrovia. This dynamic, positive and hard working woman is appreciated by all the delegates for the quality of her work and her warm personality.

"I have a long story with the Red Cross," she explains, "I had already been volunteering with the Liberian Red Cross in the 80s".

When the conflict hit Monrovia, Lucy turned to the ICRC, and would not take no for an answer. "I used to walk every day to the ICRC compound on Bushrod island," she remembers, asking for a job... "The delegates there were used to see me, and even when

they said there was no position for the time being, I would come back the day after just in case," she said.

Her perseverance eventually paid, and in 1998 Lucy was eventually hired as the (first) female responsible for the cleaning of the ICRC compound and surroundings.

Lucy showed she could definitely extend her competencies. "I remember this one day when the delegation was short of a cook and it was at the time of the end of my contract. The Head of Delegation asked me if I could replace the leaving cook on the spot and I said yes right away! I still remember the



Lucy Smith, domestic staff.

menu: fried rice with chicken and mayonnaise salad!" she said.

Being flexible and always ready to give a hand, is how Lucy ended up getting a permanent contract as a housemaid/domestic staff!



Sam Yates, 'Welcome' driver.

**S**am Yates is the 'Welcome driver'. He knows by heart all the roads in and around town, especially the ones leading to the airport, as he is always driving expatriates back and forth when they arrive in Liberia and when they come and leave for their holidays.

"I have been a driver for 8 years, and none of my passengers have ever missed a flight or even arrived late for an appointment! What I like about my job, are the discussions I normally have with the people I am driving, and the chocolates they bring back from Switzerland!" smiles Sam as he explains.

Before taking up the position of a driver, Sam worked in several departments on short term assignments, from giving a hand to the housekeepers, to assisting in the planning of

dissemination sessions for colleagues in the communication department.

"10 years with ICRC has enabled me to serve my own Liberian people, as I have always been willing to help my co-workers in all their activities. I am proud of the work of the ICRC in Liberia, and of the high standards of the organisation. Whatever your position, you always feel you are part of the ICRC family," he concluded.

### The best team so far...



Congratulations to the team of Voinjama for their active support of 'Score for the Red Cross'! Monrovia is still warming up.



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**The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)** is an impartial, neutral and independent organization with an exclusively humanitarian mission to protect the lives and dignity of victims of war and internal violence and to provide them with assistance. It also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. The founding of the ICRC in 1863 led to the evolution of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

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