



NEWSLETTER

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ICRC DELEGATION, LIBERIA

150 years
of humanitarian action

Change, Transition and Adaption

Following the post-election conflict in Ivory Coast and the massive influx of refugees into Liberia, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) expanded its presence and operational capacity in order to respond to the urgent humanitarian needs. Throughout 2011, the ICRC's emergency response aimed at addressing the needs of the Liberian communities hosting refugees, in particular in the counties bordering Ivory Coast. Two years later, although residual humanitarian needs remain, especially those related to the presence of tens of thousands of refugees, the general situation has substantially improved thanks to the intervention of national and international humanitarian actors. The national authorities, through the Ministry of Internal Affairs, have gradually taken more responsibility in coordinating the humanitarian response.

In 2012, the ICRC closed its offices in Sanniquellie and Voinjama as part of the Delegation's restructured approach, shifting its focus of operations to the south-eastern part of Liberia. With the gradual but steady improvement of the overall humanitarian situation, the time has come for the ICRC to concentrate again on building up long-term

capacity among national actors through various partnerships instead of acting primarily as an emergency responder. In close partnership with the Liberia National Red Cross Society (LNRCS), the ICRC will continue to implement its water and sanitation programs in the south-eastern part of the country and to reinforce its capacity to address independently tracing needs throughout Liberia.

As the ICRC starts 2013, the Delegation will narrow its range of activities – concentrating primarily on protection, cooperation with the National Society and promotion of International Humanitarian Law (IHL). Protection activities will focus on prisoners as well as on reuniting Ivorian refugee children and other vulnerable persons with their families in Ivory Coast. Limited humanitarian assistance will be provided to refugees and vulnerable populations in counties bordering Ivory Coast – mainly in terms of water and sanitation projects. The Delegation will also support the domestication of IHL conventions and treaties and will continue to support the LNRCS in building its capacity to enable the organization to accomplish its humanitarian mandate.

During the civil war, many combatants lacked knowledge of IHL. Victims felt the absence of laws protecting civilians and social structures in wartime; for example, even health structures were not spared and were seriously damaged. An IHL National Committee is on its way to be established and the government is working to domesticate international treaties; these are positive steps for Liberia. Ensuring that IHL training takes place in the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) has been a challenging task, but the AFL training unit - with the support of the ICRC - has made significant progress.

Although the ICRC is changing and adapting its approach in Liberia, the Delegation looks forward to continuing its involvement in Liberia.

Olivier Martin

Head of delegation, ICRC Liberia



ICRC

Protecting the Rights and Welfare of Prisoners

After more than a year, Agnès Coutou, an ICRC Detention and Protection delegate based in Monrovia, completed her mission. Before leaving she told us about her challenging and rewarding work in prisons throughout Liberia and the important role the ICRC plays in protecting the rights of prisoners and ensuring they are treated humanely.

The basics: food, water and well-being

The ICRC works alongside the Bureau of Corrections and Rehabilitation to help ensure that detainees in prisons throughout Liberia live in a safe and humane environment. The goals of the ICRC's work in prisons in Liberia are straightforward – ensuring that detainees have access to free healthcare, that water and sanitation equipment is functional and that there is enough food and the quality is acceptable. While this may sound quite basic, all of these things can have a profound impact on the well-being of those who have been deprived of their freedom.

ICRC specialists - such as doctors, nurses, nutritionists and engineers - provide technical assistance and advice to the prison authorities and the concerned ministries. My job involved going to prisons and areas where detainees were housed, liaising with those in charge and also privately talking to detainees, to help ensure their rights are protected.

The job is a challenging one with many hurdles, but we have worked hard to significantly improve conditions inside the prisons. This has encouraged both the ICRC team and our government counterparts to continue their efforts.

As a detention delegate, I focus on ensuring the rights of detainees are protected, like the right to receive free family visits, the right to have access to open air for at least one hour a day or the right for foreigners to be notified to their embassies, if they so wish.

One major challenge for prison authorities is to facilitate contact between non-Liberians in prisons and their families outside the country. The ICRC can facilitate the exchange of family news through Red Cross messages or phone calls to their



Agnès Coutou in a private discussion with an internee

loved ones. I sometimes helped detainees who does not have the skills to read and write letters or Red Cross messages.

We are also keeping an eye on the welfare of detainees who may be vulnerable to different risks in detention, such as old, sick or handicapped persons, women and also juveniles. I talk to them, in particular to check about their material conditions and their treatment.

Opening Dialogue with Prison Authorities

It is crucial to keep a constant dialogue with the corrections officers who are the ones on "the front line," as they have daily contact with detainees. The behaviour and professionalism of these officers can have a tremendous impact on the lives of the inmates. Part of our role is to remind them of their obligations and duties, but we also need to understand that their job is difficult and they face significant constraints.

Evaluating prison conditions and coming up with concrete solutions and recommendations is not an easy task and we must be patient. In my experience, it often takes several visits to get the full picture. This involves speaking to detainees, having a discussion with prison staff, thoroughly cross-checking information before finally reporting information.

The "White Woman" is Not a Doctor

On a more personal note, one of the difficulties I have faced is that many prisoners do not understand that wearing the Red Cross emblem does not necessarily mean "the white woman" is a doctor. I often have to take time to explain that I cannot examine them or administer drugs, which was a disappointment to some.

In general, I had an excellent relationship with the detainees, and the prison staff saw me more like a colleague than an external observer. This made my job a lot easier and it was a pleasure to work in Liberia. It is time to handover my duties to my replacement, and move to another country. I will one day come back and introduce this country to my family and friends.

About the author

Agnès Coutou has been working abroad on humanitarian missions for the past 13 years; eight of those years have been in Africa. Agnès joined the ICRC in 2008 and has worked in Indonesia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Liberia as a Team Leader for detention, protection and family reunification activities. She studied humanitarian law and political science in France, her home country.



A prison in Liberia

Prison Healthcare: Take the back seat

Michael Pastoors is an ICRC medical delegate. He worked in Liberia for two years (2011-2012). He tells us about his experience and life in Liberia.

I learned my two first lessons as soon as I arrived at the airport in Monrovia. First, in Liberia, it really rains a lot; and second, having lived in London does not really help one understand Liberian (pidgin) English. But after two years in the country I can say I love this country, its people and their energy. My job was a joy and I had a great experience working with my colleagues and the different authorities.

Many people trust the ICRC in Liberia because of its humanitarian activities during the civil war. The ICRC's positive reputation amongst people helped me immensely in my work. We were able to access prisons without difficulties, which was a marked contrast with other countries where I spent hours in negotiations or security checks before getting inside detention centers. The cooperation from the authorities enabled us to improve the prisons' conditions.

Rough Roads Ahead

Traveling throughout the country by car to visit prisons was not an easy task as the rain often turns the unpaved roads into muddy and sometimes impassable "swamps". Fortunately, ICRC drivers know how to deal with such tough situations and difficult roads. While the challenges could be tiring,

the travel gave me an opportunity to see how people live their day-to-day lives in remote areas and familiarize myself with the various cultures and customs.

Everybody should be realistic about improving prison conditions in Liberia. It takes time and needs cooperation and coordination from all sides. The government has a lot of priorities and health in prisons is not always on the top of its agenda, but motivated and committed people made the difference and you can see now some positive impact. The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, which had little involvement in the running of prisons before, is now in charge of prisoners' health care. Detainees have better access to health services, but actual "service delivery" requires a breaking-in period and more support is perhaps required at some levels.

In the coming years, there will still be many challenges, but we will get there. The ICRC should humbly refrain from being "the measure of all things" and leave the Liberian authorities to "drive the bus to its final destination."

Soon, I have to jump off the bus at the next stop. I can easily leave as I am not the driver. The bus will not crash. It will continue to



ICRC health teams regularly visit places of detention to improve detainees' health and hygiene conditions.

move forward – at times, slowly or rapidly, with various twists and turns; but it will move, as long as Liberia continues to enjoy peace and stability.

I would like to thank my colleagues in the ICRC and in the different ministries and prisons. I learned so much - I learned more than I could ever give. I will move on, but I will always keep a piece of Liberia in my heart.

About the author

Michael Pastoors is a physician from Germany. He completed a Master of Public Health in Developing Countries in London. During his 22-year career he has worked in twelve different countries, mainly in Asia and Africa. Michael joined the ICRC in 2000 as a Primary Health Care Specialist. Since 2005 he has worked with the Health in Detention Team and carried out detention missions in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq.

Separated by Armed Conflict, Brought Back Together by the Red Cross

In 2012, 115 children separated from their families and 5 vulnerable adults were reunited with their families in Ivory Coast through the efforts of the ICRC and volunteers of the Liberian and Ivorian Red Cross. These children fled to Liberia along with other people seeking refuge during the post-election violence in Ivory Coast that began in December 2010 and claimed some 3,000 lives.

Since the first days of the crisis, the ICRC has identified more than 800 Ivorian children, most of them in Liberia, separated from their parents. About 100 children are still without news from their families.

Lost in Liberia

Early in the morning, a 14-year-old teenage

boy packs his bag. With shy eyes he joins the other children and teenagers in the Red Cross car parked in a small border town in Grand Gedeh County.

"He is a bit anxious, but he says that he is very happy because he will soon meet his family and finally feel at home,"

says Guislain Defurne, the ICRC Tracing delegate, who speaks French with the boy. "He is impatient to see his friends at school." The other boy in the car seems to be anxiously waiting for departure. When we met him the previous day, he told us that he lost his father in Ivory Coast and fled to Liberia along with his mother, who later died from an illness.

"I am happy to go back and to stay with my uncle Michel, because I don't have anybody to take care of me in Liberia," he says to a

group of journalists when asked if he was sad to leave. He waves goodbye to his caretaker parents and friends at the refugee camp.

In a conversation the day before at the refugee camp, the boy said that he had learned to repair motorbikes in Liberia and hopes to undertake training to become a mechanic.

A teenage girl was also part of the group. A few days ago, Red Cross volunteers informed her they have found her parents and that she would be back home soon. I asked how she was treated in the camp and who had taken care of her.

"A lovely family took care of me," she said. "I cannot forget all they did for me. The organisations working here are also very kind. They all know me, as I'm not shy to talk to them and to joke with them. They do a great job."

Her face became sad and she looked down at her fingers nervously.

"Nothing replaces my parents," she said. "When people began to fight in my area, I was away from home. I followed a woman who accompanied me to the Liberian



An Ivorian separated child from Solo Refugee Camp, Grand Gedeh County, Liberia, reunified with relatives in Ivory Coast.

border and I crossed. That was more than a year ago; I lost contact with my parents at that time."

The Red Cross volunteers took her photograph to the area where her family lived. Somebody recognised her and gave the ICRC staff the contact details of her parents.

"Last week, I received a message from my parents," she said with a large smile on her face. "The Red Cross will take me home."

Heading Home

It is now time to depart. The two brothers in the car seem very sad to leave. Some of the other children could not control their

sorrow as they walked across the Toe Town bridge, before they were handed over to the ICRC team in Ivory Coast who would reunify them with their parents.

The ICRC in Liberia has so far recorded about 600 cases of children who have been separated from their families in the refugee camps and host communities in Maryland, River Gee, Nimba, and Grand Gedeh Counties.

The ICRC head of sub-delegation in Zwedru, Yves Van Loo, said that the ICRC is committed to reuniting these remaining children with their parents despite the challenges and difficulties in finding accurate information on the families of very small children and locating parents who have moved from their home areas.

Guislain Defurne is the ICRC delegate who traces these cases with his team based in Zwedru and regularly accompanies the children to the border for the reunifications. He is in daily contact with the ICRC teams in Ivory Coast.

"We should handle the children with extreme care," says Guislain, during a media briefing. "Some of them have witnessed violence or even the death of their parents. Returning them home is a first step in a healing process; it's a form of first-aid for their psychological wounds."

About the author

Oniel Bestman currently works with the Renaissance Communication Incorporated, the owner of Real TV and Truth FM in Monrovia. He reports on issues ranging from conflict and violence, human rights and crime and enjoys writing human interest stories.

You can follow some of his stories and audio reports on www.onielbestman.tumblr.com or at www.jhr.ca

Hope Through Images

For some of the most complicated remaining tracing cases, the ICRC selected eight children for a poster campaign. Their pictures have been posted in strategic public places in the four counties where the ICRC has tracing activities: Nimba, Grand Gedeh, River Gee and Maryland. The same operation was simultaneously launched in the western regions of Ivory Coast.

The ICRC organized a special event to launch the general poster campaign in one of the largest refugee camps on the outskirts of Zwedru. Representatives of the refugees, local authorities and the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC) attended the ceremony.



Liberia and IHL Compliance

International Humanitarian Law (IHL) is also known as the law of armed conflict. IHL protects victims of conflicts and contains principles and rules governing the means and methods of warfare.

Its core treaties are the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their 1977 Additional Protocols which protect victims of armed conflict. Those treaties are almost universal; the majority of the world's countries are party to them and almost all African countries are, including Liberia.

IHL prohibits or restricts the use of certain weapons, in particular those which do not allow combatants who use them to distinguish between other combatants and civilians. The ICRC and other organisations, together with some States, have argued for a ban of those indiscriminate weapons. Over the last two decades, this has resulted in the adoption of treaties such as the Ottawa Convention which bans anti-personnel mines and the Convention on Cluster Munitions which bans cluster munitions.

Those two types of weapons, anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions, are indiscriminate and disproportionate. Cluster munitions are "area weapons" which disperse over very wide areas, potentially causing very high civilian casualties when



The Armed Forces of Liberia are trained on International Humanitarian Law

they are used in populated areas. Large numbers often fail to explode as intended, leaving a long-term legacy of explosive contamination.

As to anti-personnel mines, they are mines designed to be exploded by the presence, proximity or contact of a person. They incapacitate, maim or kill and the vast majority of their victims are civilians, not soldiers. This is not just during an armed conflict, as most of the countries where casualties are reported are at peace. Landmines are indiscriminate because a landmine is triggered by its victim, whether military or civilian. Landmines are inhumane because they inflict brutal injuries and have disastrous long-term consequences.

Liberia is a party to the Ottawa Convention and it has signed, but not yet ratified the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

Liberia and International Treaties

Once a country signs up to a treaty, it has some obligations to bring into effect the provisions of that treaty. In particular, in the case of IHL treaties, countries have to adopt national laws to repress violations of prohibited actions or activities; for example, laws that punish those who commit war crimes or those who use anti-personnel mines.

If countries do not adopt such laws, serious violations of IHL will remain unpunished and the objective of the treaties to prevent civilian suffering won't be achieved.

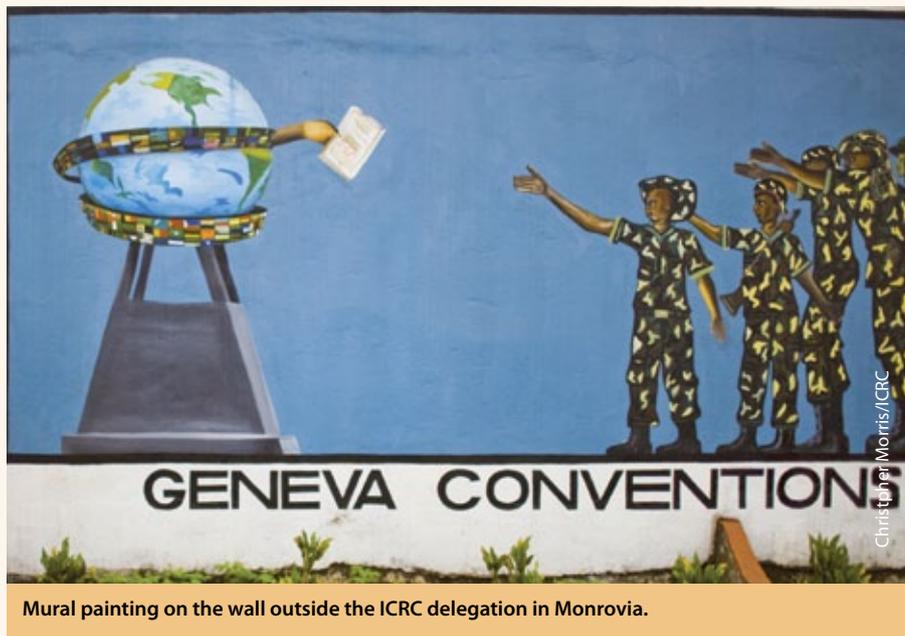
In Liberia, much remains to be done in terms of drafting and adopting those important laws and the authorities have recently taken an important step to change that state of affairs. Indeed, the authorities are in the process of formalising the creation of a National IHL Committee which will work on IHL matters, promote ratification of important treaties, such as the Convention on Cluster Munitions, and draft national laws to implement them.

In October 2012, a two day workshop was held where the ICRC and a representative from the Sierra Leone National IHL Committee shared their knowledge and experience with members of the Liberian Committee. They also provided technical support in the adoption of a strategic plan of action for the Committee.

The ICRC will continue to make its IHL expertise available to the Liberian authorities, recognising that the establishment of the National IHL Committee is a very significant step towards compliance by Liberia of its obligations under International Humanitarian Law.

About the author:

Julie Tenenbaum studied Law and International Law in France and Great Britain. She began with the ICRC as a delegate in Sri Lanka, then worked as legal adviser in the ICRC regional office in South Africa. She works now at the ICRC regional delegation in Abidjan, advising the ICRC delegations in West Africa, with frequent trips to Liberia.



Mural painting on the wall outside the ICRC delegation in Monrovia.

ICRC Cooperates with the AFL on IHL

The ICRC continues to work with the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) for the integration of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) into doctrine, education and training. IHL, also known as the Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC) or Law of War (LOW), is an integral part of the Liberian army's annual back-to-basics training.

In August 2012, the ICRC organized a two-day refresher training for six AFL IHL trainers. This was also an opportunity for the instructors to take ownership of the IHL training program. These trainers were among 13 officers trained by the ICRC in 2007 and 2009 respectively.

They were coached on the use of key messages and on the evaluation of participants' level through the questions and answers method. The introduction of the tools was to enable the instructors make IHL more practical and easier for both officers and troops to implement.

In addition, the ICRC and the AFL also held joint three-day refresher training on the respect of IHL during hostilities for over 96

officers and dozens of IHL sessions to over 450 soldiers. These activities targeted the troops based at the Edward Binyah Kesselly

Military Barracks, Camp Tubman, Camp Ware, and the Liberia Coast Guard Base.

Some of the subjects discussed included balancing humanitarian principles and military necessity; distinction and limitation, and the basic rules of combat in line with Article 3 common to the Four Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols.

Part of ICRC's cooperation with the AFL is annual support for an officer to attend an IHL international seminar in San Remo, Italy.

"As a result of the ICRC's training, the AFL trainers have an adequate knowledge of IHL, which they have started transferring to their colleagues and the AFL command has integrated IHL into the annual training calendar," said Maj Andrew Wleh, head of training.



Group of Armed Forces of Liberia officers discussing an IHL case study during back-to-basics training at the Edward Binyah Kesselly Military Barracks.

About the Author:

Staff Sergeant (SSG) Peneca Sakar is an AFL IHL trainer assigned with the Military Law Center and deployed at Brigade Headquarters as a Para-Legal Specialist.



One of the Armed Forces of Liberia IHL trainers explains combat rules to officers during back-to-basics training at the Edward Binyah Kesselly Military Barracks.

Recycling Waste is Also a Humanitarian Duty

In 2012, the ICRC delegation in Monrovia decided to recycle its waste - such as used oil and old car batteries from its vehicle workshop - and garbage from its residences.

Peter Moses roams the streets to find garbage. He then sorts it and sells part of it to generate a pretty good income every day. The rest stays here and there until it is collected by a garbage truck to be dumped in a landfill site in the city. Peter does this as he does not have any qualification to apply for a better job.

He does not know that sorting garbage is already a qualification and his activity has a huge value for the protection of the environment. But most of the garbage in the vast, growing Monrovia region is neither sorted nor recycled.

"The problem with the landfill is not only the smell," says James, a resident of Wein Town, where one landfill is located, "it is all the diseases brought by the proliferation of mosquitos, flies and rats; in addition, the site is polluted by various products which have an impact on our underground water." James also stresses that "garbage collection is also part of the problem in Liberia." He, like most Monroviens, does not sort garbage and nothing is recycled.

No Ready-Made Solutions

The ICRC in Liberia, as well as elsewhere in the world, has to improvise solutions in places where waste products - such as motor oil, car batteries or tires - have to be sent to landfills or stored indoors for proper disposal because of the lack of waste recycling companies or organisations.

"Our responsibilities extend to respecting the environment of our beneficiaries. Our humanitarian action should follow the simple rule of do no harm," says Olivier Martin, the Head of the ICRC delegation. "Indeed, the good work we do in an area should not be undermined by the destruction of natural resources due to pollution."

Waste Management

The management of private or industrial waste is not an easy task and most countries face similar challenges. For emerging



ICRC delegation in Monrovia has different bins to sort rubbish

countries, the task is even more difficult as they lack resources and expertise - and the main priorities, of course, lie elsewhere. In addition, as these nations have economies and populations that are growing rapidly, they will soon face mountains of rubbish at the doorsteps of their cities.

Be Responsible

If you enter the ICRC headquarters in Geneva, you will see on each floor several bins - each for a specific type of rubbish. But this is not only an ICRC initiative, but also a national obligation in Switzerland.

The ICRC made a firm commitment in 2007 to measurably reduce the organization's worldwide impact on the environment. Since then, it has endeavoured to explore all possible means of achieving this aim.

In Monrovia, in 2012, the delegation decided also to take up the challenge to sort and recycle the different waste products from its garage and residences.

For example, every year, the ICRC garage is using over 1'000 litres of motor oil and produces 3 tons of solid waste, including used batteries and old spare parts.

Green Centre, Liberia's first waste sorting organization, is collecting the sorted waste at the ICRC office and residences every Friday. Then, through its network, it sells to companies items that they are able to recycle. Engine oil, car batteries and spare parts find a "new life" under another identity - such as treatment for wood, iron

furniture or refilled batteries. From the residences, Green Centre collects organic waste to recycle into compost which is sold at a good price.

Through this initiative, the ICRC hopes to see other organisations following its example to recycle their rubbish.

There's Money in Rubbish

Recycling activities reduce the negative impact on the environment and prevent different types of pollution, but it is also a source of work and income.

"When I go to shops and houses in nice residential areas of Monrovia," says Peter the scrap collector, "people are scared of my appearance, thinking I am a thief or beggar, but all my income is from sorting and recycling garbage". Peter's income can sometimes reach up to 500 Liberia Dollars per day by selling waste iron, empty beer bottles or other valuable waste.

Several waste-management studies have been carried out by the ICRC in different delegations in the world, including at the headquarters, to establish the nature and quantity of waste generated by the institution, in order to gauge the actual impact of this waste on the environment. Current waste-management practices are highlighted with the hope that staff members would be encouraged to develop and adopt more environmentally-friendly behaviour.

Scaling Down Operations in Liberia

Saniquellie ICRC Sub-Delegation Ends Activities

"I fled to Liberia nearly two years ago with my two children, crossing the border with other families after the outburst of violence in Ivory Coast," says Pehe Serge, an Ivorian refugee. "We had to leave fast, with only a few items on our back and not enough food to last long in Liberia."

Pehe and his family were among the refugee families who were provided with food assistance by the ICRC soon after their arrival in the country.

In February 2011, the ICRC reopened its sub-delegation in Saniquellie - which had been closed in 2006 - to respond to the needs of the large number of Ivorian refugees that poured into Nimba County.

The humanitarian emergency phase is now over and development organisations and government agencies are now assisting refugees. After 13 months of continuous humanitarian work and cooperation with the Liberia National Red Cross Society in assisting the refugees and the host communities, the ICRC has scaled back its operations.

Major Achievements of Humanitarian Operations at the Border

"As the situation in Ivory Coast normalised and a growing number of the refugees are returning home, ICRC's support linked to the emergency came to an end and the sub-delegation closed in March 2012," says Abdi Ismail Isse, who managed the Saniquellie ICRC sub-delegation for six months and participated in the closing.

During the ICRC's 13-month operation in Nimba, 1'500 vulnerable refugee families and host communities received food. In addition, 3'000 farmers hosting refugees received 620 tons of seed rice, 2'360 farming tool kits, 180 tons of beans, 80 tons of oil, and 7 tons of salt.

Other assistance from the ICRC included the construction and rehabilitation of over 150 latrines and 40 wells with hand pumps and the rehabilitation of 10 wooden bridges. A water purification and distribution

unit was also temporarily set up by an ICRC team, which provided safe drinking water to 3'500 people daily for six months.

Through services provided by the ICRC, refugees made 4'680 phone calls to re-establish family contacts and over 400 Red Cross messages were collected and sent. 97 messages were received and distributed throughout Nimba County. 170 children separated from their parents were registered, out of which 100 were able to re-establish family contacts and 38 were reunited with their families in Ivory Coast.

Voinjama ICRC Sub-delegation Closed

The Voinjama sub-delegation was closed in December 2012, after nine years of continuous operations. It had been the largest ICRC sub-delegation in Liberia. The ICRC's humanitarian achievements throughout this time have been significant. Among them are the construction and rehabilitation of eight health structures. The ICRC's health teams have also delivered drugs and equipment and trained several traditional birth attendants. In addition, throughout the years, the ICRC teams have distributed tools and seeds to farmers, built traditional houses for vulnerable women and constructed and rehabilitated hundreds of wells, hand pumps and latrines. Scores of children were also able to find their parents thanks to the ICRC tracing teams and the Liberian Red Cross volunteers.

Peace and Development

"Situations where the ICRC must deliver vast humanitarian assistance to thousands of displaced persons in different parts of Liberia no longer exist," says Olivier Martin, the Head of the ICRC Delegation

in Monrovia. "There is no longer a need for the ambulances that evacuated the war wounded during the fierce battles in Monrovia to JFK hospital, or the surgeons who operated on war-wounded people in hospitals throughout the country, and different rebel factions are not detaining people all over the country."

After 21 years of humanitarian assistance in Liberia, the ICRC has downsized its operations as other organisations and government agencies focus on the development activities.

New Opportunities

"After closing the two sub-delegations, former local staff were given the first preference in internal vacancies," says Massa Thompson, the ICRC human resource responsible in Monrovia. "Before their contracts were terminated as a result of closing the offices, they were trained in writing standard job applications and curriculum vitae, and in how to conduct themselves in a job interview. The ICRC may recommend them for vacancies in other organisations in formal and informal ways."

Still Committed

Despite the closure of some of its offices, the ICRC remains committed to helping the people of Liberia in addressing their humanitarian needs. As long as there are critical humanitarian needs, the ICRC will remain in Liberia working closely with the Liberian Red Cross to assist the most vulnerable," says Olivier Martin. "We will continue to spread knowledge of International Humanitarian Law (IHL). The next step is to accompany the new National IHL Committee to integrate international treaties into domestic law. Downsizing does not mean leaving completely, but rather shifting to other ICRC domains of expertise."



Red Cross Movement's water purification and distribution point installed for Ivorian refugees and their Liberian hosts in 2011

Planting Palm Trees and Harvesting Hope

With beaming smiles and enthusiasm a group of women walk down to their farms in unison; even the drizzling rain cannot keep them from their work today.

Before Liberia's civil war, many farmers in Lofa County, in the north-west of the country, produced cocoa and coffee for export. The armed conflict destroyed the industry because many people had to flee to neighbouring countries and the capital, Monrovia.

Since 2009, the ICRC has played a significant role in reviving agriculture in the county. The organization has assisted more than 400 vulnerable women in producing palm oil to help sustain themselves and their families. Many of these women are single mothers or widows and are extremely poor. The project has helped them generate income and offered them hope for the future.

"When I see where we reached and the result of our work, that makes me so happy," says Krupo Forka from Zango Town in Lofa County. "I hope soon I will have enough money to finally complete my high school," she adds.

Another woman, Baddi Marwolo, walks through the farm with three of her seven children. She tells me that she hopes that the sales from the palm oil will allow her to send her children to school.

"I have the same wish for my children like all mothers in this world," says Marwolo. "I would like to send them to a good school and to ensure them a great future. As soon as our palm oil is sold, we could hopefully plan our future."

Encouraging Female Farming Activity

In September 2009, the ICRC selected 24 women's groups and invited them to farm and produce palm oil. The organisation distributed improved varieties of palm oil plants and its technical staff showed the women how to plant them. Since the inception of the project the ICRC has provided on-going technical advice to the women, as well as distributed tools and chemicals to aid them in their farming.

"I am a struggling widow who used to seek contracts from my neighbours to buy food and to send my children to school," says Hawa Manwolo. "With the palm oil production project I begin to see the end of a dark tunnel."

Sigmund Holt, then head of the ICRC office in Voinjama, says income generation has not been the only positive result of the project, but it has also improved the status of these women within the community.

"This project, after years of armed conflict in the country, has helped these women to recover their dignity and position themselves as active members of their communities," says Sigmund. "In addition, it helps the development of the society as the standard of living increases."

Taking Ownership of the Project

The ICRC has closed its office in Voinjama. The organization has worked in Liberia since 1970s, and opened its delegation in Monrovia in 1990. After years of emergency response and assistance to vulnerable persons, the ICRC is slowly scaling back its programs.

"We respond to humanitarian emergencies during armed conflicts in different areas of the world," says Olivier Martin, the Head of the ICRC in Monrovia. "Hopefully, Liberia is entering a development phase now and needs people and organizations specialized in this field."

The women's groups are anxious and concerned they could lose everything now that the ICRC has turned over the project to them.

"We will not stop the project suddenly," says Christopher Namah, a member of the ICRC team responsible for the project. "The women all know that they should take over the project and ownership of the activities. We are working on a mobilisation strategy to inform organisations and NGOs about this program. We still have some way to go with these women groups."

In August 2012, a Liberian radio station



Palm seeds provided by the ICRC

Mohammed Trawally/ICRC

-Truth FM aired a report about this project, hoping that a development organisation would hear about it and offer support, or that some business owners would be interested in purchasing the oil. Several organizations have expressed interest to support other aspects of the project.

The women are determined to keep the palm oil project running. "We will continue and will fight for it as the palm oil that we will produce is full of hope," says Sayba Younger with a large smile on her face before leaving the palm farm after a day of hard work.

The Way Forward

It is expected that these palm oil plantations in Voinjama and Kolahun Districts will begin producing oil in 2013 and the ICRC has provided agro inputs (insecticides and fertilizers) to maintain the plantations. The organization has also encouraged the farmers to purchase oil-processing machines.

About the Author:

Christiana Winnie Saywah is an associate editor at the Inquirer Newspaper. She is a member and secretary of the Press Union of Liberia and also a member of the ECOWAS Journalists Association on Risk Reduction and Disaster Management.

Providing Livelihood for Ivorian Refugees Living in Host Communities

Thousands of Ivorian refugees in south-eastern Liberia and their host communities benefit from relief items from the ICRC.



Celine (front) and other refugees return from a distribution site with relief items provided by the ICRC.

(An edited version of a radio report)

Since Ivorians began seeking safety in Liberia in 2010 after disputed elections, the Red Cross Movement has been providing assistance to the vulnerable refugees fleeing the armed violence and their hosts in Liberia.

Flanked by her three children, Céline a refugee residing in Bawaydee, a town in Tchien District, Grand Gedeh County, explained to me that she was separated from her husband and one of her children when the crisis hit their village. She had to run away empty handed, to cross the border and to reach a location where she knows some people.

The influx of refugees in communities in River Gee County has put an enormous weight on the host families who were already lacking food and lodging materials. Sanitation facilities and water resources were not appropriately maintained to satisfy all needs.

"I had to wait for the host family to finish cooking to use their kitchen pots," says

Céline. "They could provide us only a few items, we were lacking even basic things such as mats and blankets".

Between March and April 2012, the ICRC and the volunteers of the Liberian Red Cross managed to distribute kitchen utensils, tarpaulins, mosquito nets, plastic bucket and other basic items to nearly 16'000 refugees hosted by families and in communities.

Inter-relations happen to be one of the key reasons why most Ivorian refugees crossing the border are easily admitted



Celine with kids (left) and host, Nancy Gaye (right).

into the communities along the border. Similar cultural practices, inter-marriage, tribal links are easily identifiable among the refugees and their hosts, something that makes life easier for the Ivorians seeking safety. Being a refugee from either side of the border does not change much because these ties hold each family together.

Nancy Gaye, the host of Céline, told me that her daughters are all married to Ivorians and live across the border. "We also have been refugees in Ivory Coast during the civil war," she says, "we speak the same regional language, we have relatives on both sides of the border and so there is no difference." As most of the family has left the house, the company of Céline and her children is a comfort for her and Céline helps her in many ways.

In March and April 2012, the ICRC helped the farming host families by providing 40 tons of seeds and 850 tons of food. In addition, the organization rehabilitated the water and sanitation facilities in the area.

A few weeks ago, Céline has been able to locate her husband through a message delivered by a Liberian Red Cross volunteer. Prior to that, she told an ICRC delegate that she wished to find out about her husband and to ask him to join her at Nancy's place. "Thanks to the Red Cross people," she says, "My family is together again. My husband is assisting Nancy with the farming. We would like to have a small piece of land here to plant."

The ICRC is scaling down its emergency operations in Liberia and one day the institution will definitely leave the country, but Liberia still hosts some 60'000 Ivorian refugees who fled the post-electoral violence of December 2010, with many opting to stay in host communities.

Moses Kollie Garzeawu, reporting for LBS from Tchien District, River Gee County.

About the Author:

Moses Kollie Garzeawu is a reporter and producer at the state-owned Liberia Broadcasting System.

Cooperation with Journalists

The ICRC offers opportunities to journalists to participate in international media workshops and also facilitates their access to the field. Liberian broadcast journalist Moses Garzeawu explains how these opportunities have helped him improve the quality of his reporting and understanding of humanitarian issues.

Media Reporting

Journalism is not just about covering press conferences, interviewing those in power or portraying a positive image of an organization. For eight years now I have reported on numerous press events and institutions and covered politics, sports, and entertainment. But traveling to the field with Red Cross staff, sometimes to remote areas, and conducting interviews with people living in extreme conditions - the vulnerable and destitute - completely changed my view of reporting and reshaped the way I worked as a journalist.

Beyond the Signpost

Three years ago, I was asked to produce a radio program called 'Beyond the Signpost,' funded by the ICRC. The goal of the program was to inform the public about the work of the Liberia National Red Cross Society (LNRC) and its partners. This position offered me the opportunity to meet people all over Liberia from diverse social and cultural backgrounds. As a young journalist, listening to and reporting on their stories has enriched my experience as a person and reporter. Now I understand that the most important stories are not just about politics, but also about the families and ordinary people who contribute through their jobs and activities to the development of our country.

The ICRC and LNRC gave me the opportunity to travel to places I would

otherwise not have had the means to access. I have been able to report on humanitarian issues and have gained experience and developed my analytical skills. In addition, I have increased my knowledge about humanitarian and developmental issues through participating in media workshops the ICRC has organized for journalists, such as the one on International Humanitarian Law.

ICRC Media Services

The ICRC also provides journalists with news articles and free television and video footage. This service is not only available to well-known media agencies and international broadcasters, but also to Liberian journalists. At any time we can call an ICRC media representative and ask about the humanitarian situation in anyone of the over 70 countries in which the organization works. This has helped several Liberian media outlets report using independent sources free of charge or without a subscription to an international media agency.

The ICRC has also kept Liberian journalists informed about various treaties and international laws that, I hope, the government will soon integrate into national law. These international instruments include the Kampala Treaty on the Displaced and Refugees and the Arms Trade Treaty, which is still under discussion at the United Nations.



Moses Garzeawu and Jerry Byepu (LBS TV journalist) interviewing Nancy Gaye about Ivorian refugees hosted by her family.



Moses Garzeawu and Jerry Byepu (LBS TV journalist) interviewing Lawrence Sackor of the Liberian Red Cross who advises farmers on a project supported by the LNRC and ICRC in Grand Gedeh County.

Capacity Building

The ICRC, in cooperation with the Liberian Red Cross, has also been able to organize annual training for Liberian journalists within the country or abroad. In 2010, I participated in an ICRC humanitarian reporting workshop in Nairobi along with a colleague, Estelle Liberty, from Power TV and Radio. This was a great opportunity for me to widen my network with foreign and African journalists.

Oniel Bestman is a well-known journalist who is popular amongst young listeners. In 2012, he participated in another seminar organized by the ICRC in Nairobi. Traveling abroad and exchanging ideas with foreign journalists made him a stronger and more committed reporter. Oniel now reports more about the humanitarian situation in Liberia. Just a few weeks ago, I heard him reporting about a success story involving female farmers in Lofa County supported by the ICRC.

The ICRC is scaling down its operations in Liberia and one day the institution will certainly have to leave the country. But we will continue to keep in close contact with the institution and its delegates at the headquarters in Geneva, or in the field in various countries, as they are an accurate source of information for the media. Informing Liberian citizens about the humanitarian situation abroad is part of our responsibility and the ICRC helps us to do it.

About the author:

Moses Kollie Garzeawu is a reporter and producer at the state-owned Liberia Broadcasting System. Moses has been the presenter of the Liberian Red Cross Radio Program (BEYOND THE SIGNPOST) since 2009. He collaborates with the West Africa Democracy Radio, in Dakar, Senegal, and with Goal.com and has previously worked as a reporter and producer for Independent Star Radio and Radio Veritas.

Good Hygiene Begins at Home

A lack of basic health-related facilities such as latrines and hand pumps poses major challenges for Liberians. The ICRC continues to construct and rehabilitate toilets and hand pumps throughout rural areas and to educate Liberians about best hygiene practices.

Before latrines and hand pumps are constructed, the ICRC educates community members about the usage and maintenance of the facilities. Afterwards, they are again reminded. The ICRC works alongside “water committee groups” set up by the communities.

In 2012, the ICRC conducted dozens of hygiene promotion sessions targeting hundreds of beneficiaries. The program educates people on better sanitation and how diarrheal diseases are spread. The hygiene promotion sessions are conducted in towns and villages, as well as with families in their homes.

“The training brings together men and women and they discuss best hygiene practices that are depicted in a book of pictures drawn by a local artist,” says Ruth Dunn, Hygiene Promotion Field Officer.

Ruth gives participants tips on basic health care, and encourages them to keep their homes and surroundings clean. She conducts the sessions through storytelling and discusses the importance of personal hygiene, domestic hygiene and other environmental issues.

Wilfred Garh, the Town Chief of Old Poham town in Grand Gedeh County, says that hygiene training has changed the behaviour of those within the community.

He says community members now boil creek water before they drink it, place dishes on a drying rack and hang clothes on lines.

Ma Victoria Darrow lives in Tuobowarteken community. She remembers one main message during the hygiene promotion session, and described it as “safe disposal of children’s faeces.” Victoria says the number of babies’ mothers and others who carried

out good hygiene behaviour continues to increase.

About the Author:

Ruth Y. Dunn is a sophomore student of the University of Liberia and works as an ICRC hygiene promoter. She has previously worked as a recreational supervisor/CEP monitor with the United Methodist Committee on Relief, as a hygiene promoter supervisor with Action Against Hunger and as a protection supervisor with Save the Children UK.



One of the hand pumps rehabilitated by the ICRC for Ivorian refugees and host communities

Pedram Yazdi/ICRC



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