



Move towards sustainability

When I first worked in Liberia in 1990, times were much tougher: I remember destroyed infrastructure and misery. The ICRC was active in the fields of protection of the civilian population, providing water in isolated locations and the city of Monrovia, and conducting emergency health care services. Coming back to Monrovia in 2006, the picture was completely different, even the needs of the population had changed.

Liberia is rebuilding and developing with support from ICRC's expertise, as it accompanies the Liberians in their journey towards development and sustainability. Our activities in the country have been adapted to the new context of rehabilitation.

Since 2001, the ICRC has reunified almost 3000 children with their relatives. In collaboration with ICRC delegations in the neighbouring countries, follow up on conflict related tracing activities will be completed by April 2008.

By then, the protection needs of children reunited with their families are expected to have been met.

The ICRC is adapting its programs to the current needs of the most vulnerable. Consequently, it will concentrate on integrated assistance projects comprising of protection, health, water and sanitation, developing cash crop marketing and supporting the authorities and communities in Lofa and Grand Kru counties. Priorities will include intensifying efforts to help communities and the public service to assume their obligations of providing basic services and sustaining community facilities constructed or repaired by the ICRC.

Eventually, the ICRC will keep on advocating for the integration of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) in the training of the Liberia armed forces, and work with the new authorities to enhance their understanding and acceptance of IHL, and press for its national implementation.

The ICRC will continue to support the Liberia National Red Cross Society to carry out preventive work targeting young people. Stepping up its structural approach, the ICRC will also continue to build its capacity in tracing, disaster management and promotion of IHL.

ICRC's program in Liberia emphasizes capacity building: providing people with education, tools and technical support, so that they can work independently. In 2007, the ICRC trained 15 laboratory technicians and 200 traditional midwives, (90 more are expected to graduate by the end of April 2008), while 800 persons have received instruction on water and sanitation issues. 600 new policemen and soldiers have been briefed on the law of armed conflict. In 2008, specific training will be set up for farmers in remote areas.

Let us look forward now, may 2008 be blissful, peaceful and joyful!

Riccardo Conti
Head of Delegation, ICRC Monrovia

Instructors receive ICRC training on law of armed conflict



Staff of ICRC Serge Bourgeois, Armed Forces and Security delegate (on the left), and Riccardo Conti, Head of delegation, ICRC Monrovia together with AFL mentors.

In 2007, Liberia set up a new and professional army. Recruits had to pass all the required physical tests, medical assessments, aptitude tests, and a very rigorous background examination, before joining the new Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL).

“We want an army that stands on high principles, that is serving and respecting the law. A military institution that is credible, that respects the rules of the game, rules of engagement and respects civilians,” said Hon. Brownie J. Samukai Jr, the Defence Minister.

The AFL recruited 102 soldiers last year, from a field of 3,000 applicants. A batch of 1,000 is forecast for 2008.

The best of them will soon be leading hundreds of AFL soldiers. Among other responsibilities, they will be in charge of the integration of the law of armed conflict into

their operations and the training of their soldiers.

As mandated by the international community, the ICRC is supporting the national programmes undertaken by the States for the integration of the law of armed conflict (or International Humanitarian Law) into the education, training, doctrine and operations of armed forces around the world.

Last November, twenty instructors of AFL attended a week-long training on IHL at the Edward Binyah Kesselly Barracks. The training targeted selected new officers/NCOs who will then teach IHL to the next recruits during their basic training. Representatives of the Ministry of Defense (Inspectorate, Legal, Strategic Initiative, Operations and Plans sections) and mentors of Pacific Architects and Engineers (PAE), also participated.

In addition, the training covered the concrete rules of the principles of distinction between

military and civilian objects, limitation and proportionality, and their integration at all levels of decision and execution.

Col. Serge Bourgeois, the ICRC Armed Forces and Security delegate stated that commanding is not only an honour, it is a responsibility. “At the heat of the battle, soldiers rely on individual and collective automatisms. Respect for IHL during operations depends on its previous integration into each and every dimension of military life,” he said.

The simple knowledge of principles is not enough. When it comes to protected persons and objects for instance, the soldiers must know the correct measures to take and how to perform them. They must have integrated these dimensions into making decisions and executing tasks.

The ICRC will support the training of trainers through advice, coaching and distribution of documentation about IHL.

Drawing exhibition to mark 20th anniversary

Thirty-five arts students participated in the 2007 drawing contest on Red Cross activities in Liberia. Selection was hard to make. The best twelve drawings were selected for use in the 2008 calendars of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the Liberia National Red Cross Society (LNRCS).

As Liberia is enjoying peace and development, activities of the ICRC have adapted to this new context. The exhibition was a way of retracing ICRC's presence in Liberia over the last 20 years. It was also an opportunity to explain its current operational changes.

During the conflict, activities of the ICRC ranged from provision of food, housing materials and health programmes to the rehabilitation of wells throughout the country. ICRC teams were also deeply involved in restoration of family links. Together with the LNRCS, they succeeded in reuniting families separated by the conflict. ICRC delegates also conducted hundreds of detention visits.

"To me, the ICRC is linked to tracing activities. The posters of missing children mean a lot to me. In those times, it meant hope. And for many of my friends, it also meant happiness when the Red Cross managed to find their families and get them back together," recalls Davis Yuhepuyon, who drew a picture of a family member searching ICRC photo boards for her child.

Many of the paintings illustrated memories of food assistance, as well as emergency medical services. "Thank God those times are behind us," John, a visitor at the exhibition said, when commenting on the pictures displayed at the Museum. "We all remember those times when the Red Cross came to help us when we had nothing. We are all rebuilding this country now and looking ahead to better days," he said.

Since the signing of the Accra Peace Agreement in 2003, means of communication have opened, security has improved, and the needs of the population for food and protection especially - have therefore diminished. The ICRC is participating in the reconstruction of the country by providing training in health, water and sanitation, and assisting the government in its efforts to provide access to curative and preventive healthcare. It is also involved in encouraging those traditionally involved in marketing agricultural production, through training and financial incentives. Additionally, ICRC is helping to strengthen the Liberia National Red Cross Society.

As mandated by the International community, it also teaches International Humanitarian Law to the armed forces of the country (AFL, Police, UNMIL).

Congratulations to the artists!



Above: the finalists of the drawing contest exhibiting their paintings in front of the Liberian National Museum.

Pict 1: "Tracing", by Ericson Monger.

Pict 2: "Food distribution", by David Yuhepuyon.



“Take care of ICRC facilities: all are for you the community people”



Actors of DAM Opera interpreting the ICRC delegate and the chief of community.

In June 2007, performers from DAM Opera theatre group with the support of ICRC, staged shows with key messages of reminding people to take care of facilities provided to them by the ICRC.

The sounds of drum beats and percussions filled the air in New Georgia Junction, as two young dancers were seen flying to the rhythms of the *Sasa*. In a few minutes the place was crowded by children, quickly followed by their parents and other community members.

Scenes from the play showed villagers complaining about the state of their toilets and wells. They initially blamed the ICRC who had built those facilities. But actually the community is responsible for the maintenance and repair of the facilities.

One scene showed an ICRC delegate visiting a village to remind the community leader that the facilities belong to them, and it is therefore their responsibility to take care of them. His final message to them is that clean facilities and proper hygiene behaviour is essential for the well being of the villagers!

Capacity building and sustainability

“During the emergency phase, the ICRC took full responsibility in all aspects of the work,” says Kieh Isidore, the ICRC Water and Habitat (Wathab) assistant.

“In those times, the Liberian people were vulnerable, lacked access to free movement due to the fighting, and basic social services had collapsed. Today, the situation is different, we now have an elected government and life is gradually returning to normal,” he explained.

Consequently, maintenance and repair are in the hands of the communities. Where possible, the ICRC uses training to advise and support their efforts to manage the facilities.

With the continuous support from ICRC, the communities are involved in the construction and rehabilitation of their own wells and latrines. The ICRC

trains some community dwellers as pump mechanics, and sets up water and sanitation committees to be responsible for regular maintenance of the facilities. The ICRC also provides sessions on hygiene promotion and health education.

“People often just need a bit of help to get started and then they’re totally able to take care of themselves. ICRC is supportive as it understands the challenges we face, and if a problem arises, they are always there to help us solve it,” said Joseph Nyumah, a resident of New Community.

The drama programme started in June 2007 and will continue until July 2008. About 133 performances have been held in Monrovia, Lofa and Grand Kru. More than 10’000 people have attended the shows.

Statistics

Since 2007, the ICRC has constructed/rehabilitated over 150 wells, repaired 66, built 60 institutional and 307 family latrines, and trained 96 community water committees comprising of 336 pump mechanics. About 100’000 inhabitants have benefited from increased access to safe drinking water and latrines.



Isidore Kieh, ICRC wathab assistant, explaining the role of the ICRC

The ICRC hands over laboratory responsibilities to the Ministry of Health

In the aftermath of the war that ravaged Liberia, parts of the country were completely abandoned and dramatically suffered from loss of medical facilities.

During the rainy season, Lofa County and Grand Kru are hardly accessible. Mud, broken bridges and floods are a constant challenge even for the strongest Land Cruisers. This also means that victims of malaria and other diseases are completely isolated from the ones who could save their lives.

In 2005, the ICRC launched a program to rebuild health facilities. A main component of the program focused on medical laboratories and the training of technicians in remote areas.

A year later, more than 30,000 patients had benefited from the expertise of fifteen ICRC trained laboratory assistants, while four laboratories were built, two in Lofa county and two in Grand Kru. At the end of 2007, the ICRC handed over the programme to the Ministry of Health.

Robert Keusen, the ICRC lab technician, recalls the launching of the program. "Even if we had to struggle with the logistical constraints, there were critical needs that had to be met. We started from scratch, but overcame all the obstacles because people were so motivated. They were eager to learn and be useful to their communities," he said.

Since 2005, the ICRC Health team has recruited and trained fifteen laboratory technicians and assistants. It provided them with microscopes and instructed them through regular workshops and on-the-job training. The technicians are now perfectly able to carry on about thirty different tests and examinations related to haemoglobin, blood, urine and stools. One of the most common infections they can diagnose is malaria, through malaria smear and Paracheck.

"My role in the whole process is now very minimal. The technicians are skilled and are able to do the job by themselves. Over the last couple of months, the ICRC paid them a

visit to provide some technical support where needed, but they are completely qualified," Keusen explained.

"Considering the level of instruction of the laboratory assistants and the impact on the population, we can definitely consider our objectives as having been achieved," he said.

The Ministry of Health appointed Mr Edwin Fallah for the laboratory monitoring and supervision. Robert and Edwin have spent a whole year working together, and Edwin now has all the knowledge to ensure a proper follow up of the programs.

Beginning 2008, the Ministry of Health will be completely in charge of all the laboratories in Grand Kru and Lofa County. In addition, ICRC's medical team will be available to facilitate the work of the ministry, and to provide training and advice according to the needs.



From Harper to Zwedru: An ICRC vehicle manouvering an inaccessible road during the rainy season.



ICRC delegate Robert Keusen and the team of laboratory technicians

Rehabilitation of Cocoa and Coffee Plantations in Lofa County

A traditional industry destroyed by the war

Coffee and Cocoa plantations are a major source of income for rural households in Lofa. Before the 2002 to 2003 conflict, many farmers in Voinjama and Kolahun districts produced cocoa and coffee for export. These activities represented their main source of income, supplemented by other food crops like rice, cassava and vegetables, as well as small livestock production. Small income generating activities carried out by the population and limited formal employments enabled them to get access to cash. The area also profited from cross-border trade with Guinea and Sierra-Leone for foodstuffs and livestock.

The worst time of the conflict between 2002 to 2003 had direct consequences for most of the population. All their activities were severely curtailed. Looting and displacement to Guinea, Ivory Coast and Sierra-Leone left most people with few sources of income. The cash crop plantations were abandoned and left fallow, leading to the collapse of the marketing system.

ICRC's support

After the conflict, the population started returning to Lofa. Currently, most of the households have already returned. Efforts of the farmers have focused on restarting the production of staple food and rice for consumption. The humanitarian actors in the area have also focused much of their support on boosting the rice production to ensure food security.

After years of abandonment, cash-crop plantations are covered by wild and thick



Abdullah K. Tulay, the Gbandi Cooperative extension officer, assessing the cocoa with farmers from Susubolahun.

vegetation. Rehabilitating them is a daunting task, and returning farmers need support.

In 2006, the Ecosec (food and nutrition) department started a food-for-work programme to recover 6000 ha of cash crop plantation. This was still running in 2007, with cash for work support. However, in order to guarantee the commercialization of cash crop production with fair prices and in a sustainable way, the ICRC and Gbandi cooperative society in Kolahun district agreed to implement a pilot project aiming at improving benefits obtained by 300 farmers, from the selling of their cocoa production.

Abdullah K. Tulay, the Gbandi Cooperative Society extension officer said that when he

returned to Lofa with his family after the conflict, his cocoa and coffee plantations had totally overgrown. "We had to work without appropriate tools and income to re-start our previous farming activities. The support provided by ICRC to Gbandi Cooperative Society enabled us regain our financial status," he explained. This support has also been extended to Kolahun district farmers and their families.

The ICRC assisted Gbandi Cooperative Society to purchase 23 metric tonnes of cocoa from 143 vulnerable farmers in remote areas, at a fair price. The ICRC used a voucher system to subsidise the cooperative's transport costs.

Patients gain access to specialised health care

“She is always like that, laughing and ready to play,” said the mother of Gbayonah, a sparkling child of five years who arrived on board the Mercy Ship.

“Even in the aircraft, she was so excited, not even a little scared or anxious,” she said.

It is a hot sunny day in Monrovia, but even in the shade, Gbayonah has a hard time keeping her head up. Her eyes cannot focus and she can hardly distinguish her surroundings. “She is almost blind. We did not know initially, but realised when she was about three months old that she could not see us,” the mother explains.

The nurse from Mercy Ships explains that Gbayonah, like her friend Joseph, suffers from cataracts, a clouding of the lens of the eye. They can only distinguish some vivid colours, and are highly sensitive to light and glare.

Both children come from a remote village in Harper, south of Liberia. Their parents heard about the eye clinic that could help them. The ophthalmologist easily diagnosed the cataracts and referred them to Monrovia where they could get the surgery performed, as Harper did not have the necessary facilities.

“Everything happened so fast. The doctor had said that the Red Cross would transport us, and that we had to be on a waiting list. We did not even wait for two months before the aircraft came to pick us up,” says Gbayonah’s mother.

On Monday morning, Gbayonah and Joseph went for surgery. The following day both had recovered from the operation. As we enter the bedroom, we find little Joseph sitting on his bed smiling at his reflection in a mirror. The boy who was so shy when we first met him is now radiant with joy.

A very similar picture awaits us as we enter Gbayonah’s bedroom. The girl is proudly wearing silver butterfly sunglasses, and



The ICRC aircraft - RED 607

nothing can hide her smile, even the eye-drops her mother is pouring into her eyes.

A few days after their surgery, Gbayonah and Joseph are on the tarmac of the airport, ready to fly back home. When she gets home, Gbayonah will fulfil her dream of going to school. As for Joseph, he says he will be ‘good at school, and very good at soccer!’

Since the beginning of 2007, the ICRC air operations team has enabled 65 patients to benefit from specialised treatment. “Flexibility is the key word,” explains Michael Stanley, Assistant to the Air-Operations manager.

“We are adapting our routines according to the patient’s needs. Sometimes our aircraft make two rotations a day between Harper, Voinjama and Monrovia. Depending with the patients’ medical status, they have a priority over the operations, and if there is a choice to be made between an employee and a patient, the patient takes the seat,” he said.

In recent months, the transfer of patients has proven to be a real success. The ICRC air operations and logistics departments work closely to ensure that patients are taken care



Gbayonah on way back to Harper.

of, from the pick-up at their houses, through the shuttle to and from the airport, and back to their village.

“Our best reward is to see their smiles when they come back,” said Stanley. “It does not matter if there is need to work during the weekends, or when there are changes on the schedules at the last minute, so long as the patients can benefit at the end of the day,” he said.

The ICRC transfers 75 per cent of Mercy Ship patients. Other come from JFK hospital and specialised organisations such as Handicap International. This program will continue throughout 2008.

10 years of service with ICRC in Liberia



Albert Diatokpa Jamah, Protection Assistant, reuniting a family in Monrovia.



Ireland Belleh Teasley, radio responsible at the Monrovia Delegation.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has been active in Liberia since 1990. Over the years, people have come and gone, and some of them are now the “memory of the organisation”. Bravo to them for a job well done!

In 2007, ten staff members celebrated their 10 year anniversary with ICRC. “According to our staff experience and ambitions, we offer them possibilities of training so that they can always develop their skills,” said Matthias Schmid, in charge of the Human resources. “ICRC staff are committed people with team spirit, able to interact with people from a wide variety of cultures and background. It can take patience and sometimes a great dose of humour to really understand each other, but experience has proven that respect for each other is the key to any communication issues,” he said.

“I joined the ICRC as a daily hire with no work experience, but had great motivation,” said Ireland Belleh Teasley, the radio responsible.

“I had just graduated from high school and this was my first job,” she said.

During the ten years of service, Ireland said that the ICRC gave him the chance to develop his skills in a wide variety of activities. From a security guard, he worked in Chancellery, then for the Logistics department for a while, before telling his bosses that he was interested in working for the IT Department. They trusted his competencies and trained him on the use of computers and radio equipment.

“Working with so many foreign colleagues was a challenge for me, as accents are sometimes so hard to catch, especially over the radio, but I have learnt a lot and I am familiar with almost any accent now,” he said.

Albert Diatokpa Jamah, a Protection Assistant has worked for eleven years in the Tracing department, serving in various capacities like tracing, protection field officer and database

responsible. “I see working in the ICRC in Liberia as working for my own people to help alleviate human suffering. As a national staff member, you work with people from different cultural backgrounds and ideas, without any discrimination. We are all together achieving the same humanitarian goals,” he said.

He adds that he enjoys doing family reunification assignments. “When families are separated due to conflict and there is no news about their whereabouts, then after a tedious and prolonged searching processes, one day you see an ICRC Land Cruiser driving into the yard with the lost child. You see the tears of joy rolling down the cheeks of parents or relatives and at that moment, you feel that you have achieved and done a good job,” he said.

ICRC in Liberia currently has 31 expatriate delegates, backed by 276 national employees.



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The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of war and internal violence and to provide them with assistance. It directs and coordinates the international relief activities conducted by the Movement in situations of conflict. It also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

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