

The United Nations and Management of Armed Hostilities in Africa: Implications on Internally Displaced Persons in Mano River Basin

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Abstract

Since 1960 to date, Africa has been characterized by armed hostilities of all kinds. Many countries have been involved in certain armed conflicts which have left more than 30% of their population internally displaced. Therefore, this paper seeks to examine the United Nations and Management of Armed hostilities in Africa, and its attendant implications on internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Mano Region. Methodologically, we generated our data from secondary sources of recorded human documents. We adopted the ex-post facto research design and Ballum Justum theory (theory of a Just War). Inherently, there are certain dangers in fighting armed hostilities and that of the Mano River Basin is not an exception, considering the magnitude of havoc, cost for the citizens of those countries. Accordingly, the United Nations should place more premium on the rehabilitation, reintegration, resuscitation and general rebuilding of the IDPs in the said region. Its compliance with these measures would contribute immensely to the reviving of the Mano River Basin into the center stage of world politics.

Key words: United Nations, Internally Displaced Persons, Mano River, Humanitarian assistance, UNICEF

Introduction

For the past four decades, Africa has been a major platform of most armed conflicts, fought across the globe. Between 1990 and 2011, more than 40% of armed hostilities that occurred around the world, took place in Africa. In the same vein, about 25% of such armed conflicts occurred in the Mano River region, which comprise - Guinea; Sierra Leone and Liberia. Like every other civil war, the Mano River has adversely affected their economic and political development, especially the manner at which about 49% of the region's population were internally displaced during one armed combat or the other.

Internally Displaced Persons are those uprooted from their homes or communities facing untold suffering due to armed conflict, natural or manmade disasters, or economic hardship. There are two major causes of forced displacement, both of them stemming from lack of security. Firstly, people move away from their homes when their lives are threatened by armed conflict, discrimination, violence or sometimes intimidation. This poses lots of uncertainties about the future. Some people for the first time face the experience of losing or separated from their loved ones, expose to physical harm, loss of their normal way of life, and usually some find themselves as destitute in the new environment. Secondly, people leave their homes because their livelihoods are threatened. Hostility and insecurity make it impossible for them to earn a living or to access essential services, because they can no longer lean to their fields, trade their products or reach their markets. This disrupts their access to education, water supply, health care and other necessary services. Displacement is a violation of International Humanitarian Law (IHL). Where there is strict adherence to IHL, displacement can be prevented. However, it is difficult to prevent displacement once individuals and communities are under immense pressure in which life and dignity are at risk. It is then the responsibility of International Agencies to assist these people in the best way possible to reduce their sufferings.

The Mano River Union, consisting of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, was established in 1973 to constitute customs and economic union between the member states in order to improve living standards. Decisions are taken at meetings of a joint ministerial committee.

Since 1990, sustained conflict in the Mano River basin has spread across borders and engulfed the region in a severe humanitarian crisis. Civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the early 1990's led to the exodus of more than one million refugees to Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea over the course of the decade. In addition to refugees, sporadic fighting internally displaced an estimated one to two million people throughout the region. Although Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone formed the Mano River Union economic pact in 1973, the conflicts of the past decade severely strained political and economic relations among the three states. A struggle for control of diamond fields in Sierra Leone has been at the heart of the crisis in recent years. Several failed peace accords and peacekeeping efforts, collapsed economies, and some of the worst human rights atrocities in recent history made this one of the world's most severe humanitarian crises. Although, 2001 brought improved security in Guinea and Sierra Leone, an upsurge in fighting in Liberia continues to threaten the stability of the region. Since 1990, the United States Government (USG) has provided more than \$970 million in emergency assistance to those affected by war in the Mano River Region. However, effective utilization of this fund by the agencies involved, is one issue that is very important and the steps to minimize the occurrence internally displaced persons during any armed conflicts, are major concern of this paper, especially with respect to African continent.

Humanitarian Relief Assistance

Humanitarian relief is “all acts, activities and the human and material resources for the provision of goods and services of exclusively humanitarian characters, indispensable for the survival and the fulfillment of the essential needs of the victims of disaster (United Nations Report, 2008). Chege, (2005:45) opines that humanitarian relief is “the generic term used to describe aid and action designed to save lives, alleviate sufferings, maintain and protect human dignity during and in the aftermath of emergencies”. He described further that humanitarian assistance includes both responses by local communities and governments of affected countries and the international response to crises.

In summary, it is the provision of material or logistical assistance for humanitarian purposes, especially in response to humanitarian crises including natural disaster and man-made disasters. Also, that the reason or the objective is to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity. Guy, (1998:65) concluded that the First World War brought to a close a very rich episode in the development of the humanitarian cause across the globe. Its main achievements include the following:

- Confirmation of the first international conventions for the protection of wounded prisoners and civilian populations in wartime, the banning of some types of weapons and the birth of International Humanitarian law (IHL).
- The development of technical methods of assistance and mass logistical support to protect and bring aid to these some group in wartime.
- The creation of new research tools and work methods whose concepts are still in use today, such as research agency for locating prisoners, established procedures for jail visits, development of wartime mobile surgical techniques, launching public health campaigns or prevention programs.
- The universalization of a humanitarian movement with a mission to remain neutral, impartial and independent.

In view of the above explanation, the following functions are performed by the humanitarian relief agency. The humanitarian agencies perform variegated functions as the nature of their objective demands. In the United Nations Organisation (UNO), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), undertakes the function of coordinating the activities of their operational agencies. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “The mandate of the (OCHA) is to strengthen coordination among the United Nations bodies that provide assistance in response to emergencies” it therefore, follows that the function of OCHA in humanitarianism is that of coordination.

The operational Agencies under the coordination of UN – OCHA include; United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and World Food Programme (WFP).

They have the primary roles of delivery of relief assistance and they have performed in their various jurisdictions. During the past decade, war and civil strife have left an estimated one million children orphaned or separated from their parents. A further twelve million children had been made homeless and ten million had been severely traumatized across the globe as a result of one armed conflict and another. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has sought to meet their needs by supplying food, safe water, medicine and shelter. UNICEF also aims to assist development by supporting activities such as immunization and education in refugee camps. Special programmes assist traumatized children and help unaccompanied children to re-unite with parents or extended families. In 2010, UNICEF provided emergency assistance to about 26 countries affected by conflict. In a bid to deliver humanitarian relief to children during armed conflicts, UNICEF has pioneered the concept of "children as zones of peace" and created "days of tranquility" and "corridors of peace" in Africa, Asia, Europe and Central America.

UNICEF has drawn world attention to the plight of children in war. Since 1987, some two million children have been killed; six million have been seriously injured or disabled and thousands have fought in armed conflicts. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the agency responsible for operational activities for natural disaster mitigation, prevention and preparedness. When emergencies and natural disasters occur, UNDP Resident Representatives coordinate relief and rehabilitation efforts at the national level. On many occasions, Governments call on UNDP to help Design rehabilitation programmes and to direct donor aid.

UNDP helps to ensure that recovery activities are integrated with relief operations. Humanitarian aid and development support are thus linked, bringing the earliest possible resumption of sustainable development to a troubled area. UNDP rehabilitation projects aim to alleviate poverty, often the root cause of civil strife. To ensure that the resources provided will have the greatest possible impact, each project is carried out in consultation with local and national government officials. This community based approach has helped in the provision of urgent but lasting relief for hundreds of thousands of victims of war or civil upheaval. Today, many conflict-scarred communities have improved their living standards thanks to training programmes, credit schemes and infrastructure projects.

The office of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), since 1997 to 2011, provided international protection and assistance to more than 22 million people who had fled war or persecution, of whom some 12 million were refugees and some 4.4 million were internally displaced persons. Recently, internal conflicts have been the main cause of refugee crises in African mano river region. As at end of 1997, UNCHR assisted 2.6 million refugees from Afghanistan, 631,000 from Iraq, 525,000 from Somalia, 517,000 from Burundi and 487,000 from Liberia, 215,000 for Sierra Leone and 115,000 for Guinea. Although, UNHCR's mandate is to protect and assist refugees, it has been called upon more and more to come to the aid of a wider range of people living in refugee-like situations. In recent years, the distinction between refugees and displaced persons (those who have not crossed the international borders) has become increasingly blurred, with the number of people displaced within their own country –the "internally displaced"- overtaking number of refugees.

Again, the World Food Programme (WFP) provides relief to millions of people who are the victims of disasters. It is responsible for mobilizing food and funds for transport for all large-scale refugee-feeding operations managed by UNHCR. Every day, WFP emergency response teams rush supplies to millions of the victims of war, ethnic conflict and political strife or flood, drought and crop failure. Such crises, especially manmade disasters, consume most of WFP's resources. A decade ago, two out of three tons of the food aid provided by WFP was used to help people become self-reliant. Today, the picture is reverses, with 70 percent of WFP resources going to victims of conflicts. Between 1997 and 2011, WFP assisted more than 97.3 million victims of war, earthquakes, floods and droughts across the globe, with Africa receiving a huge chunk of this assistance.

Actors in Humanitarian Relief Assistance

Humanitarian relief is an extra-ordinary complex subject involving many actors, including governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) such as United Nations Agencies, which seek to respond simultaneously to natural disasters (e.g. earthquakes and hurricanes) and/or complex emergencies (e.g. war and other violent conflicts). These actors bring life saving skills and technologies to re-establish basic services such as water and sanitation set up schools, and to provide food and medical supplies.

Johnson, (2008:43) provides some major actors in humanitarian aid as follows:

- i. International and Regional Organizations: The most important actor in the provision of humanitarian aid and development assistance is the United Nations and its various agencies, the work of which is funded by member states. The World Bank also funds many development projects, in addition to regional development banks.
- ii. Unilateral Assistance: As well as multilateral assistance, many countries also direct aid unilaterally through their own foreign aid and development agencies. Major donors include the United States, the European Union, Japan, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Canada and Switzerland. As well as being informed by a moral obligation, aid also forms a significant component of foreign policy for many of these countries, and levels of aid vary according to the foreign policy imperatives of the incumbent government.
- iii. The Military: The Military is important primarily in order to provide a secure environment in which relief agencies can operate. In some circumstances, the Military also plays a direct role in providing aid. This is usually when the escalation of circumstances mean that international organizations and non-governmental organizations find themselves overstretched or unable to deal with security problems faced in particular situations. The military can be used to improve the management and coordination of the overall humanitarian response and to provide capacity for technically and physically demanding needs such as infrastructure repair to restore communications and supply routers. The military formed an important part of the humanitarian response in Somalia, Rwanda, Kosovo, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

The United Nation's Humanitarian Assistance in Mano River Region

A central component of United Nations policy is to ensure that emergency relief contributes to recovery and longer term development in the affected areas. Economic and social development remains the best protection against disaster-whether natural or, as is increasingly the case, man-made. Kathryn and Scott (2007:12) observed that the United Nations also “assist countries in incorporating disaster prevention and preparedness into their overall development plans”. Since United Nations coordinated humanitarian relief operation in Europe following the devastation and massive displacement of people in the Second World War, the organization has been relied on by the international community to respond to natural and man-made disasters that are beyond the capacity of national authorities alone. Today, the organization is a major provider of emergency relief and longer-term assistance, including food, shelter, medical supplies and logistical support, primarily through its operational agencies and a catalyst for action by government and other relief agencies. Providing immediate assistance to victims of an emergency is the first, essential step. But humanitarian action by the United Nations system goes beyond relief to involve long term rehabilitation and development.

The role of United Nations on humanitarian assistance was made stronger by the creation of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). “The mandate of OCHA is to strengthen coordination among the United Nations bodies that provide assistance in response to emergencies”. The office works to secure agreement among agencies of the United Nations system on the division of responsibilities, such as the establishment of coordination mechanisms, the mounting of need-assessment missions, the preparation of consolidated appeals and resource mobilization.

However, the core functions of the Emergency Relief Coordination are:

- 1) Policy development and coordination, ensuring that all humanitarian issues, including those which fall between gaps in existing mandates of agencies such as protection and assistance for internally displaced persons are addressed.
- 2) Advocacy of humanitarian issues with political organs, notably the Security Council.
- 3) Coordination of humanitarian emergency response, by ensuring that an appropriate response mechanism is established on the ground. This is done through deliberations of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), which is chaired by the Emergency Relief Coordinator, (see UN-OCHA).

Four United Nations entities: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); United Nations Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF), World Food Programme (WFP) –have primary roles in the delivery of relief assistance.

Humanitarian assistance, especially in Mano River, has become counter-productive. It was a humanitarian exercise aimed at bettering the lots of the region's refugees and Internally Displaced Person (IDPs).

But this has not been the case; rather it worsened the IDPs situation in the region as undue tension grew between the refugees and the host communities. According to Fyle (2003:34), this tension is increased or heightened by aid agencies that concentrate more on humanitarian aid to the refugees, to the utter neglect of the host communities which had borne the initial brunt of the problem. He went further to say that, “with these strained relations, various coping strategies were adopted by host communities and refugees alike, and some of the groups at the short end of the stick were women, whose vulnerability in such refugee situations became more starkly obvious”.

Guinea, which has been described as the last man standing in Mano River due to her relative stability then turned out to be a haven for refugees and IDPs which attracted humanitarian assistance from humanitarian agencies. Guineans didn't object the refugee inflow and emergence of IDPs into their country due to the kinship and cultural ties provided by their Mano River Union. This initial acceptance often gives way to antagonism and acrimony by the activities of humanitarian agencies who concentrate on the refugees, to the utter neglect of the internally displaced persons (host communities). By so doing, humanitarian assistance affects the conflict and refugee situation in Mano Region negatively by implanting apple of discord among the refugees and the host communities who whole-heartedly gave them a warm reception.

Similarly, Roulet (2010: 37), agrees that providing assistance to refugees while neglecting the host communities, as the agencies had been prone to doing, has severe limitations for success. It is also generally agreed that no progress could be made while IDP problems are tackled simply through humanitarian assistance. Catholic Relief Service (2011) poss that “host communities see first-hand the assistance that the refugees and internally displaced persons are receiving: food, medical care, water and education. This creates a huge problem of perception. They often ask, “why are we not also receiving these items when we also need the help?” This statement above exhibits the lamentations of the host communities while they see assistance being channeled towards the refugees in the Mano Region in the utter disregard of themselves (internally displaced persons).

Providing immediate assistance to victims of an emergency is the first, essential step. But humanitarian action by the United Nations systems goes beyond relief, to involve long term rehabilitation and development. A central component of United Nations policy is to ensure that emergency relief contributes to recovery and long-term development in the affected areas. Economic and social development remains the best protection against disaster-whether natural or as is increasingly the case, man-made. Kathryn and Scott (2007:16) observed that the united nations also “assist countries in incorporating disaster prevention and preparedness into their overall development plans”.

In fact, the role of the United Nations Organization on humanitarian assistance can be drawn from the activities its entities which are: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), World Food Programme (WFP) and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). The UNDP is the agency responsible for operational activities for natural disaster mitigation, prevention and preparedness. The UNDP Resident Representatives coordinate relief and rehabilitation efforts at the national level. On many occasions, Government calls on United Nations Development Programme to help design rehabilitation programmes and to direct donor aid. The UNHCR has the mandate to protect and assist refugees. It is called upon often times to come to the aid of a wide range of people living in refugee-like situations. The World Food Programme (WFP) provides relief to millions of people who are the victims of disasters. It is responsible for mobilizing food and funds for transport for all large scale refugee feeding operations managed by UNHCR. These entities work under the coordination of United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Challenges of Internally Displaced Persons

One of the major consequences of wars fought in contemporary times, has always been either a serious case of refugeeism or the dilemma of internally displaced persons. The control, management and alleviation of the problems encountered by these war victims are enormous to be recounted. However, the following are some critical challenges encountered by the said group of persons during and after armed conflicts of any kind.

- a. On the Host Community:** Migrating to some other communities when there is threat to life and security are most times temporal. The families believe the movement is temporal and hope to be back to their usual homes as soon as possible.

They sometimes seek shelter amongst friends and families, feed on the meager resources of the host communities until such a time when International Humanitarian Agencies step in to alleviate their sufferings. Pressure on domestic resources reduces household incomes (host) since a huge proportion of this is spent on food, health and other necessities. Consequently, it has a multiplier effect on savings, a necessary economic activity that supports investment. The lack of investment opportunities will affect productivity negatively, reduce job creation and hence reduce national income. This will ultimately affect community development because remittance from productive industries to government in the form of taxation is not realized.

Budget lines are distorted especially at the national level. Government planned expenditure for the provision of basic amenities like health care, education; security etc for the estimated population will be outrun because of the increase in population especially in the short run. To meet this challenge, government will be forced to embark on massive revenue generation drive starting at the domestic level. This involves increase in taxation which will ultimately again increase prices of basic goods and services. Host communities or country is then left with the option of grappling with inflationary situation.

Where Camps are provided for IDPs, this can have a profound effect on social norms and interaction. Lack of resources and options can promote violence (including sexual violence), exploitation and discrimination. In addition, camps can be infiltrated by armed groups and weapons can become readily available, both of which increase risks and insecurity for inhabitants. Recruitment, both forced and voluntary, is not uncommon in such camps in fighting forces.

- b. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs):** The attitude of NGOs in terms of their operations depends on the political, economic and social conditions in the country. Therefore, the donors, founders and beneficiaries influence and dictate NGOs operations. Some NGOs usually claim autonomy in their operations base on their aims and objectives when in actual fact it is not the reality. The truth of the matter is that operations on the ground is been dictated by the shareholders who are the donors. It is a situation of who pays the piper dictates the tune. This affects the NGOs and creates unnecessary competition among themselves for resources and attention from government.

Therefore, procedural rights in terms of collecting data on IDPs in West Africa are hampered and the maximum benefits to be enjoyed by IDPs are normally not enhanced.

NGOs and Governments in most parts of Africa are strange bed fellows. Advocacy campaigns on government policies on IDPs are met with stiff resistance and West African governments renege on their commitments in fulfilling their own parts of agreements in some situations. For example, government withdrawal from fulfilling its obligation of repatriation of IDPs in Sierra Leone forced NGOs to over stretch the meager resources available to address the issues of repatriation.

Other challenges faced by NGOs in handling IDPs' situation in West Africa include insecurity, inadequate resources and the management of these resources. They also face the challenge of sustainability in handling the repatriation of IDPs. Often and again, IDPs are seen returning back to the camps after repatriation. This poses additional problems for the work of these organizations in West Africa, especially in Mano region.

- c. Displaced Persons (Survival Syndrome):** Statistics show that African IDPs are among the world's most defenceless. They are at high risk of ongoing armed attack, starvation, sexual violence and exploitation, enforced military recruitment, and diseases including HIV/AIDS. When the conflict is over, many IDPs find it difficult to return and resettle in situations in which infrastructure is lacking and access to basic goods and services, including health and education facilities, remains limited. The internally displaced often face intolerance, and are unable to access food, education and health care. Too often, they lack basic documentation and the ability to exercise their political rights. This is worst observed in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia (the three together form the Mano River Region).

The Economic Effect of Internally Displaced Persons on Mano River Region

Protracted problems of the internally displaced persons, give often give rise to problems for the host community and refugees alike; but the huge socio economic impact on the host communities cannot be over-emphasized. The most significant military incursions from the sending country, increased local crime and violence and give rise to organized crimes, including gun running, drug smuggling and human trafficking (Jacobsen 2009, Rutinwa 2008).

On the issue of economic impact, the nature of this impact varies and it is often difficult to determine what can be specifically attributed to the internally displaced persons. In conflict-affected refugee hosting areas (RHAS), local microeconomic systems are often already destroyed or badly frayed by insecurity or prior economic problems. Refugees and internally displaced persons bring new problems including pressure on scarce mixed, because they can also bring resources with them. These impacts of refugees and internally displaced persons on host communities generally are true about Mano River Tri-state countries.

Particularly, Bassey, (2010:46), posits that there are several other issues with the potential to generate or exacerbate conflict within Guinea. This include: refugees. Guinea bore the brunt of the influx of refugees from Liberia and Sierra Leone as well as from Guinea Bissau. It is now hosting a new influx from fighting in Liberia and the Cote d'Ivoire. This creates a burden on Guinea's resources as well as its environment. The Mano river union women peace network said more than two-thirds of Guinea's forests have been devastated. On the case of Sierra Leone, Basic education and policy support (BEPS) reports that Sierra Leone faces enormous socio-economic and political problems arising from the circumstances of the IDPs. With peace being declared in Sierra Leone, UNHCR moved from "facilitating" the return of Sierra Leonean refugees in Guinea and Liberia to a "promoted" repatriation in 2003. More than 225,000 refugees have returned voluntarily to Sierra Leone (165,000 from Guinea and 63,000 from Liberia), with another 100,000 still in their host countries.

Basic education and policy support (BEPS) activity creative associates international, Inc summarized the impacts of internally displaced persons and cross-border movement in Mano River Region as follows: The mass movement of populations between countries can tax the host country's resources and create conflict with the local population. In the past decade, Guinea has been saturated with refugees and although the refugees from Sierra Leone are being repatriated.... Large population movements are inherently destabilizing, and internally displaced persons have the potential to bring the problems they are trying to escape with them to their new location. The mass move of populations creates security issues. Among those thousands of persons could be criminals or rebels. They could be carrying arms or other illegal items. This can lead to crime and protection issues within the host country, the militarization of civilian refugee camps, and the use of the host area as a re-supply base or illegal activities.

Statistical Data of Internally Displaced Persons in Mano River Region

The population of displaced persons in Mano River Region, for the past two decade is outrageous. It is important to note that there are strong group affiliations based on language and familial ties that are maintained across borders of the Mano River Basin countries --- Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. This produces important social and economic networks that stretch well beyond the borders and into the rest of the region. However, the outbreak of war in the Basin in 1989, followed by rebel incursions on Guinea in 2000 and 2001, have created instability and a great security risk for civilian and displaced populations in the entire region.

Sierra Leone and Guinea sustained coastal trading networks that resulted in a large Sierra Leonean diaspora in Guinea's capital, Conakry. When war erupted in Sierra Leone in 1991, Guinea continued its political and trade support. Ahmed Kabbah, president of Sierra Leone, received continued political support from Guinea in his fight against the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). RUF, backed by Charles Taylor of Liberia, crossed the border into Sierra Leone from Liberia. This resulted in hostile relations between Guinea and Taylor's Liberia. Nearing the end of 2000, fighting broke out in the Parrot's Beak bordering northeastern Sierra Leone and northern Liberia. The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) launched continuous attacks on Sierra Leonean refugees and civilians in the southwest border of Guinea. As a result, 250,000 refugees and local civilians fled north. This was the first incident of internally displaced people within Guinea. For the purpose of clarity, the statistical figures are stated according to countries in the said region.

Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone experienced one of the most brutal civil wars in the 21st century. This conflict started from the level of a problem, systematically promoted to that of chaos, and the situation graduated into mayhem, where limbs of babies and pregnant women were chopped off, child soldiers bet each other to prove whether a pregnant woman is carrying a boy or girl in her stomach, only for them to prove the winner by brutally opening the belly of the pregnant woman using a knife in the presence of onlookers, burning of villagers in their homes, etc. The fear of some of these events, perpetrated out of callousness on the part of the combatants, led to unprecedented displacement in Sierra Leone.

In April 2001, both the United Nations and the Sierra Leone government made a concerted effort to resettle large numbers of IDPs, as well as returning refugees. In 2002, President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah declared officially the end of the 11-year civil war, in which an estimated 50,000 people were killed and up to half of the country's 4.5 million, population displaced. Displaced Sierra Leoneans were resettled in accordance with the National Government's Resettlement Strategy, which applies to IDPs as well as refugees and ex-combatants with their dependants. By the end of 2002, beneficiaries were offered resettlement packages, which included a two month food ration, household utensils, plastic sheeting, and in some cases transportation. According to United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN-OCHA), a total of some 220,000 registered IDPs were resettled in five phases since April 2001, the last 12,800 of them in November 2002. Many more returned home spontaneously. Officially at least, this left no more IDPs in Sierra Leone. However, it is acknowledged that "the challenges of closing camps remain a concern and the social problems of homelessness within the urban districts of Freetown. This will continue to be a major component of the development agenda issues to be address by government.

Despite the general improvement of the situation, Sierra Leone's social development indicators continue to rank amongst the worst in the world. Infant and child mortality rates remain very high at 170/1,000 and 316/1,000 respectively. The Maternal Mortality Rate is estimated at 1,800/ 100,000 live births and skilled personnel attend to only 46% of births. Trained medical staff is scarce and unevenly spread over the country. Life expectancy in Sierra Leone remains below 40 years. Like in the other countries in the region, malaria, respiratory infections, STIs or even improper child feeding practices are to blame for these high rates. In addition to this, sudden outbreaks of epidemics such as cholera, tuberculosis, river blindness, etc are heavily pronounced.

Liberia

The Fourteen years of armed conflict in Liberia, resulted in successive waves of large-scale forced displacement. Civilian populations fled their homes and villages as a result of widespread killings, looting, property destruction, rape and child recruitment. About 35 IDP camps were established, mostly in rural areas close to Monrovia. By August 2003, when the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed in Accra, there was already an estimated 500,000 to 600,000 IDPs throughout the country, a significant proportion of whom were located in Monrovia, living in congested and destitute conditions in public buildings and other available spaces, including the national football stadium.

In October 2003, a transitional power sharing government was inaugurated. This paved way for the deployment of a 15,000-strong UN peacekeeping force. Immediately, a large-scale inter-agency effort was mobilized to support IDPs in need of assistance to relocate to the IDP camps, where food assistance and other basic services were provided by a range of UN agencies and NGOs to some 324,000 individuals registered by World Food Programme (WFP).

Between November 2004 and April 2007, some 326,990 IDPs were assisted through inter agency approach to return to their places of origin. By March 2008, about 321,634 had returned and the camps were formally declared closed and assistance discontinued in April 2008.

However, in May 2010, research conducted by NGOs on the ground revealed that about 30,000 individuals were still residing in the former camps, of whom just over 16,000 had received return packages but had either not departed or had done so but later returned to the camps. 12,000 claimed to have been wrongly excluded from return assistance owing to errors in the WFP registration and verification process; of these, only 5,480 had their claims validated and received assistance to return. The final stage of the return process was completed in May 2011 as 122 unregistered families, identified as vulnerable, were transported to their areas of origin and received a specially designed assistance package, including shelter kits.

Approximately 5,000 Liberian refugees have crossed to Sierra Leone since the beginning of 2003. The current refugee caseload is estimated at 54,000 individuals living in 8 refugee camps. Since the LURD took control of the border area in Liberia, the influx of refugees has stopped. There are still an estimated 17,000 Sierra Leone refugees in Guinea and 10,000 more in Liberia waiting to be repatriated. All Sierra Leonean refugees are expected to be repatriated to their country by the end of 2011. Needs in Liberia are huge due to the constant displacement of population and the almost total absence of basic services and infrastructure.

The internally displaced population in Liberia is estimated at 500,000 IDPs, with 200,000 of them living in public buildings (schools, government buildings, stadium) in and around Monrovia. Several thousand Sierra Leonean and Ivorian refugees, Liberian returnees and other Third Country Nationals (TCNs) living in Liberia have also been caught in this humanitarian crisis. Actual numbers are unknown, but UNHCR estimates the population of concern in Eastern Liberia at around 98,000 individuals (38,000 Ivorian refugees, 45,000 Liberian returnees and 15,000 TCN).

Guinea

In Guinea, the refugee population living in camps in the Kissidougou and N'Zérékoré prefectures is estimated at around 90,000 refugees. In August 2010, the refugee population in Kissidougou was estimated at 32,000 living in the camps of Boreah, Kountaya and Telikoro. There have been significant changes in the population of these camps: half of its population was repatriated to Sierra Leone, whilst more Liberian refugees arrived from Kouankan and Dabola. The need now is to prepare the transition to development rather than short-term relief. For the time being, refugees remain dependent on humanitarian assistance, particularly on food. Land is available for cultivation but the late arrival of the latest refugees prevented them from preparing the land and planting. In 2004 they were able to produce part of their own food requirements. The situation in N'Zérékoré is significantly different. Refugees still arrive from Liberia. Out of a total 64,700 refugee caseload, around 25,000 arrived from Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire during the first half of 2003. This continued influx of refugees forced humanitarian organizations to adapt their projects in order to cope with the increasing demand. The estimate of internally displaced persons (IDP) in Guinea range from 100,000 to 300,000.

Meanwhile, as the movement of fighters along the border is likely to continue, protection remains a key sector of intervention. This assistance should not target refugee populations' exclusively but also resident communities that are exposed to a potential increase of population. Support to host communities affected by the arrival of refugees will mitigate tension between the two groups. Support to the repatriation of refugees is foreseen if the security situation in Liberia improves following the deployment of peacekeeping troops. Refugees, particularly those living in Kouankan, have already expressed their desire to return to their villages as soon as possible.

With the exception of some of the refugee camps, needs in the country are more structural than actually humanitarian (e.g. rehabilitation of road and health infrastructure, schools, strengthening of institutions, income generating initiatives, rehabilitation of markets, etc...). Emergency aid is believed not to be the appropriate tool to address these needs but rather rehabilitation and long-term programmes.

The high number of displaced people influences, not only external political dynamics, but also actively changes internal socio-economic and political situation within Guinea. With scarce resources and nearly absence of social services, ordinary Guinean citizens have had to endure extreme poverty. The host population therefore is not in a strong position to provide support to another few hundred thousand dispossessed people fleeing violence. Not only are returnees living in dire conditions, the host community is also living in chronic poverty still trying to recover from the rebel fighting in 2000 and 2001. Recently, there have been reports indicating a rise in tensions between the host communities and the returnee and refugee populations. Therefore, aiding the host community in economic recovery and rehabilitation would also directly benefit the refugee and returnee populations.

Conclusion

In West Africa, internal displacement of persons occurs as a result of conflicts and other natural disasters. While this is the case, conflict in this region varies, depending on economic, social and political situations in the states. Sierra Leone, Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire for example experienced displacement as a result of armed fighting for political power. In Nigeria, displacement has been caused as a result of conflict over the unequal distribution of resources, religious and ethnic factors.

It is very glaring that there is very little support for host communities. In West Africa, IDPs often received assistance from families and the local communities. In as much as we acknowledge the efforts of the local communities for relieving the state and international agencies by way of providing shelter and some other amenities, increase in the number of IDPs can pose lots of constraints on the local communities in the long run. This has the tendency of raising economic and social tensions amongst community members and IDPs. ECOWAS must emphasize protection and assistance programmes that will address the needs of the host communities.

Also, there is the lack of institutional capacity and adequate resources at national level to coordinate activities of stakeholders including nongovernmental organizations. The absence of this will lead to duplication of efforts in alleviating the sufferings of IDPs. Therefore there is a need to build the capacity of national institutions and civil society groups in order to address the issues of internal displacement.

Finally, insufficient inclusion of IDPs in decision making needs to be address by both community and key stakeholders. These major stakeholders must also ensure the dissemination of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and formulation of national laws that are derived from them.

Humanitarian relief assistance rendered by the agencies on mano river region has not improved the refugee situation; rather, it induces tension and discord between the refugees and host communities. The roles of united nations on internally displaced persons is multi- faceted and attend to the multi-dimensional task through their various specialized agencies-UNDP, UNHCR, WFP, and UNICEF; which operate in the areas of development, refugees and IDPS, emergency food supply and children respectively. The activities and the operations of the various U.N humanitarian agencies are coordinated by the United Nations office for coordination of humanitarian Affairs (UN-OCHA). The UN-OCHA is the heart while other humanitarian agencies are the veins; and finally, The politics of refugeeism in Mano River Region affects the economy in the region negatively, refugees bring new problems including pressure on scare economic resources. It brought devastation of the Guinean forests and other economic resources it also brought into Sierra Leone, Liberians that turned rebels. Therefore, Refugees International recommends that: Donors provide development assistance to areas affected with the internally displaced persons, with priority given to areas of the Forest Region most seriously affected by the refugee presence. Donors support the 2005 Global Appeal and its programs for assisting all vulnerable groups including the host community, internally displaced people, and Guinean returnees through better access to food security, health and education services. The Government of Guinea protect refugees and Guinean nationals from human rights abuses, including forced recruitment.

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