
Search for Common Ground Regional Strategy Mass Information on Refugee Repatriation

Search for Common Ground (SFCG) has been working in partnership with UNHCR in the sub region since 2000. Initially beginning in Guinea, SFCG has also partnered with UNHCR in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire. SFCG, with national programmes in the four countries, is ideally positioned to roll out a regional strategy for mass information. The recent desire and sudden return of refugees into Nimba, Grand Gedeh and Maryland counties from Côte d'Ivoire has generated a demand for information and reporting on the part of SFCG. This write-up seeks to display how SFCG will support the return of refugees into Liberia from the sub-region.

EXISTING STRATEGIC RESOURCES AND CAPACITIES

Collecting Information and Contacts

Maryland, Grand Gedeh, Lofa, and Nimba counties are counties of high return of Liberian refugees. SFCG's Talking Drum Studio (TDS) has correspondents responsible for these counties with the ability to bring in news and information about the resettlement and repatriation exercise. Their focus is on the reintegration framework in these four key counties, namely: IDP and refugee resettlement; relationships between host communities, remainees and returnees; and provision of support and reintegration opportunities amongst other information. These correspondents, indigenous to the area and intimately connected to the people and the language, are collecting materials for TDS's programmes. They have established links with the UNHCR offices in each of these areas. These correspondents have met convoys and have traveled with them as they go back home, following the journey.

Radio Programmes

Situation Report is a well-established national radio programme aired once weekly in Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea. It is a platform for social reintegration focusing on information required by resettling people, messages about the UNHCR mandate, protection issues and updates from LCRRR. This programme integrates the information from the correspondents and that from the major institutions working on these issues and implementing partners of UNHCR.

Additionally SFCG has nine well-known national programmes in Liberia that host material from the correspondents and others gathered in the field related to a variety of issues that TDS is working on. The present focus is on social reintegration framework and the areas of high return.

Radio Drama

TDS produces two dramatic series that spotlight repatriation and reintegration issues within their storylines. *Today is Not Tomorrow*, the most popular TDS programme in Liberia, has two major characters that are returnees. A thrice-weekly drama, it is a platform for their experience of

making decisions for the family, their issues and concerns as well as problems they encounter on returning home.

Unity Boat, produced in Sierra Leone by a joint Liberian-Sierra Leonean team, is a radio soap opera drama hosting the issues of the people in the Forest Region. Broadcast in Mende and Kissi to target two of the major ethnic groups of Lofa County, two characters are intimately linked with return into Foya Kama in Liberia. Two chiefs who met each other during the war in Kailahun visit each other regularly from Foya Kama into Kailahun. Their discussion is the platform to talk about conditions found in Lofa County in Liberia. Another character, a meatstick seller who lives in Kailahun town, used to live in Monrovia and he corresponds frequently with his brother who still lives there. The market place where he sells is used to convey messages about the events and environment in Liberia. This programme is aired in Kissidougou in Guinea as well as on Radio Moa in Kailahun, Sierra Leone. Radio Moa's broadcast covers much of Lofa County as well as Kailahun and Kenema Districts in Sierra Leone.

Channels of Information

SFCG partners with a network of community radio stations in each country where it works. In Sierra Leone it works with 18, Liberia 35, Côte d'Ivoire 14, and Guinea, where airwaves are more restricted, two.

SFCG has key linkages to Radio UNMIL (Liberia) and Radio ONUCI (Côte d'Ivoire), which have the largest broadcast in terms of range in the countries. The county correspondents do regular live reporting through Radio UNMIL about the conditions in these high return counties. Radio ONUCI broadcasts *Situation Report*.

Radio Moa is a community station in Kailahun District in Sierra Leone. TDS has a very close relationship with this radio station, which is based in an area where many Liberian refugees are living. The station has developed a programme called *Where Are You* that seeks to link up Liberian families with their missing loved ones from other areas. According to anecdotal evidence, this radio station can be heard at night in Monrovia in the dry season and its signal covers most of Lofa County, Kailahun and Kenema Districts, and parts of Guinea—strategic areas for refugees and their information needs.

Radio Nimba is a independent radio station based in Sannaquellie in Nimba County. Positioned with a 500-watt transmitter, this radio covers much of Nimba County and also broadcasts into Côte d'Ivoire. SFCG has developed a special relationship with this radio station. Their transmitter had been broken for some time and through private donations and OTI, SFCG has been able to order a new transmitter for the station. This purchase will allow wide coverage to resume.

To complement its radio work, SFCG in Liberia has trained drama groups in Grand Gedeh and Nimba Counties to work with the peace committee that are in place there. These channels and conduits can be used to pass UNHCR messages into communities where radio is inaccessible or to residents cannot access or do not listen to radio.

Special Features

SFCG has a regional strategy that allows the organization to plan and implement cross-border activities. This is key for refugee repatriation mass information work. With national programmes in Sierra Leone, Guinea, Liberia and recently established in western Côte d'Ivoire, SFCG can strongly focus on the border areas. SFCG has relationships and correspondents in all these areas. Following convoys from Kailahun to Foya and integrating this information into other programming such as *Unity Boat* and others is an ongoing capability.

ACTIVITIES

Providing on the spot information on the repatriation

Arrangements have been concluded with UNMIL Radio to allow SFCG/TDS correspondents access to the Mission's communications systems to highlight repatriation and reintegration activities. A 15-minute slot has been allotted on "Dateline Liberia" Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays for this update.

Information on the reintegration of returnees

SFCG/TDS correspondents provide coverage in Nimba, Bong, Lofa, Cape Mount, Maryland and Grand Gedeh Counties of issues related to return, including relationships between host community members and returnees, reclaiming of property, reestablishment of basic social services and others. These materials are incorporated into TDS' programs, including *Situation Report*.

The main issues and concerns of returning refugees such as reclamation of property, finding shelter, access to farm land, and security will be put into dramatic form and broadcast in areas of high return. These drama products will also be created in languages such as Gio, Krahn, Mano and Grebo and distributed to radio stations in areas of high return. SFCG produced similar dramas last year, which were distributed through UNHCR networks into Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire.

Capturing the reintegration work for returnee population

Success stories of individuals or families who have returned and are contributing positively to the rebuilding of their communities will be captured. Using both video and radio programs these programmes will be shown and aired in refugee camps. Some of the audio material is incorporated into a variety of radio programmes to be aired in Sierra Leone, Guinea, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire. This is designed to help people make informed decisions to return.

Go and See visits

In collaboration with UNHCR, SFCG will organize 'go and see' visits to refugee camps by former refugees who have returned and settled, enabling them to share their story with other refugees in the sub-region. This exercise will also be captured in video and radio programs.

Visits to refugee camps

Refugees continue to have doubts and concerns regarding the repatriation exercise. SFCG/TDS correspondents and producers of *Situation Report* and *Unity Boat* will pay regular visits to Sierra

Leone, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire to engage refugees on their concerns and expectations on returning. Their findings will be produced into radio programs.

Coordinating regional synergy

The mass information campaign will also be supported by SFCG's regional offices, programs and networks in the sub-region. Stories from the repatriation and reintegration process will be integrated into existing TDS programs in Sierra Leone. TDS staff in Sierra Leone are also better placed to accompany some of the convoys from Sierra Leone to Liberia, conducting interviews and sending the products to Liberia, and airing them in Sierra Leone as well. With a correspondent in Kissidougou who travels frequently to Nzérékoré, two people based in Daloa with access to the western border and the radio proximité located in these areas, as well as a team in Sierra Leone based in the south and east, SFCG is well positioned to support the mass information campaign in the sub region.