

FIELD REPORTS

How Liberian and Sierra Leonean Refugees Settled in the Forest Region of Guinea (1990–96)

WIM VAN DAMME

Department of Public Health, Institute of Tropical Medicine, Antwerp, Belgium

Refugees in sub-Saharan Africa are often seen as homogeneous flows of victims, settling in camps and dependent on outside help. The 500,000 refugees who settled between 1990 and 1995 in the Forest Region of Guinea present a very different picture. These refugees fled the civil strife that started in late 1989 in Liberia and later spread to Sierra Leone. There was a series of different refugee waves. During 1990–91, four major waves of early arrivals brought some 350,000 refugees to Guinea. They were in good general condition, as they had not suffered prolonged hardship in their home country. Rural refugees fled to rural areas, and urban dwellers settled mainly in the cities. Most settled in border areas and many integrated spatially and economically in the host societies. A refugee-assistance programme supported this self-settlement, and granted free medical care in the Guinean health services. Food aid started late, but most refugees fared relatively well, as they could develop partial self-sufficiency. Between 1992 and 1995, an additional 150,000 refugees arrived in a series of smaller waves. These late arrivals had lived through several years of serious hardship, had often been internally displaced before, and were in poor health. By that time, refugees were encouraged to settle in camps. The majority, however, continued to self-settle. In many areas, refugees outnumbered their hosts. In 1996, roughly half of the refugees were living fully mingled with the Guineans, and some 25 per cent were living in new or paired villages. Less than 20 per cent were living in refugee camps, but due to their visibility, this small proportion shaped strongly the image outsiders had of all the refugees. The settlement pattern of the refugees determined largely the degree of self-sufficiency they could reach. The diversity of this situation was not sufficiently acknowledged by the aid agencies. Recognizing such diversity is, however, a precondition for assistance that complements the refugees' own coping mechanisms.

Refugee movements in sub-Saharan Africa are often seen, especially by aid agencies, as homogeneous flows of exhausted and destitute victims of man-made disasters, settling in camps, and dependent on outside emergency

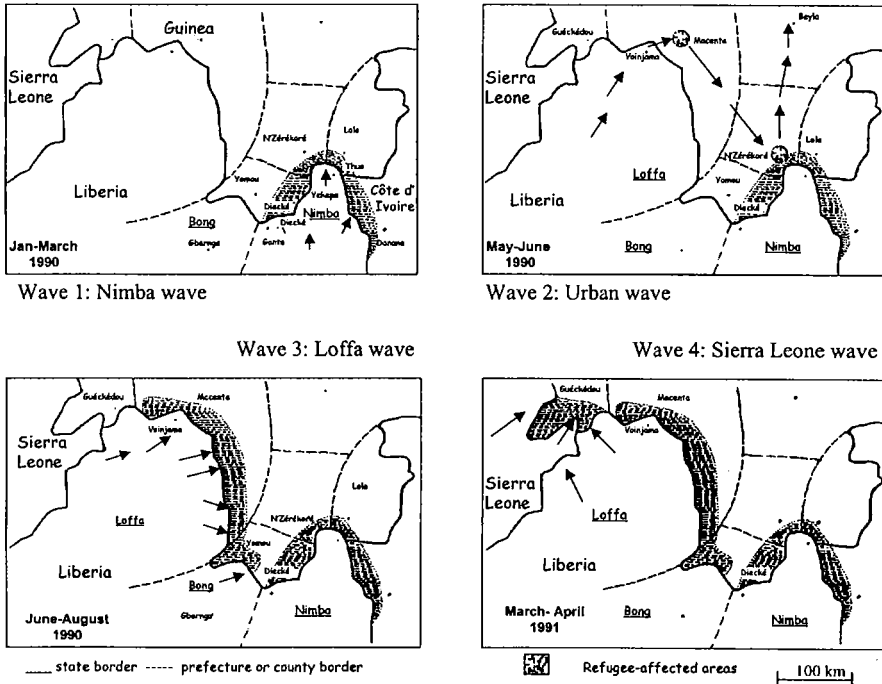
assistance. Consequently, refugees receive indiscriminately a 'standard relief package'. An in-depth analysis of the 500,000 Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees in the Forest Region of Guinea shows, however, a very different picture. The refugees arrived in a series of waves, each with its own characteristics. The general condition of the refugees and their degree of destitution varied widely among the different waves. Many refugees self-settled in the border areas, developed their own coping mechanisms, and became partly self-sufficient, but to varying degrees, depending mainly on the density of refugees and the degree of integration with the host population. This complex reality was not acknowledged by the aid agencies. However, understanding the refugees' own coping mechanisms is essential and outside assistance should be adapted accordingly. The waves can be situated in time and in space (Figure 1). This article describes the different waves of refugees, and how they settled. First, between January 1990 and April 1991, there were four major waves that brought some 350,000 refugees, the 'early arrivals', to Guinea. Then followed a period of relative quiet till the end of 1992, after which a series of minor waves continued through 1995 and brought some 150,000 'late arrivals' to Guinea. The four major waves (1990–91) were quite homogeneous: most refugees of each wave shared common characteristics, such as ethnic background, geographic origin and degree of destitution. There were, however, important differences between waves, and these had important consequences in terms of needs and coping mechanisms of the refugees, and influenced assistance to the refugees.

Early Arrivals: The Four Major Waves (1990–91)

The First Wave: Rural Refugees from Nimba County (January–March 1990)

On 12 December 1989, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), led by Charles Taylor, attacked Butuo in the Nimba county of Liberia from Côte d'Ivoire. Liberia's president Samuel Doe declared that 'he would transform Nimba county into an empty land, where even ants would not live'. This threat, and the subsequent persecution by the Liberian Armed Forces, forced many inhabitants of Nimba county to flee to the nearest border. At the beginning of January 1990, some 10,000 refugees of the Mano tribe arrived in the Diecké area, Yomou, Guinea (Wave 1 in Figure 1). They settled right across the border in Mano villages, where they often stayed with relatives. The refugees were destitute but in good health, as they had not suffered hardships before arriving in Guinea. The refugees shared houses with Guineans or lived in public buildings such as schools. Soon, they started to build their own houses on sites indicated by the host community. This resulted in the expansion of existing villages or the creation of twin villages with one single name. The size of the refugee villages was often equal to or even larger than the older ones. Both communities kept their separate identity, the Guineans being the 'citizens' and the Liberians the 'refugees', each with their own traditional chiefs. Such

Figure 1
The Four Major Waves of Refugees, Guinea, 1990-91



paired villages resulted from the interaction between refugees and local communities. No outside actor, be it the Guinean government or foreign agencies, influenced this process. No areas were overwhelmed by the number of refugees and no serious epidemics occurred. During February and March 1990, the fighting in Nimba county between the NPFL and the Armed Forces of Liberia intensified. More rural Mano refugees arrived in similar circumstances in the border areas of N'Zérékoré and Lola prefectures. They settled in the same way among their kinsmen (Wave 1 in Figure 1). By the end of March 1990, the United Nations estimated their total number at 97,000. During the same period, similar numbers of refugees, most of them Gio and Mano, fled to Côte d'Ivoire where they were also allowed to settle freely among their fellow tribesmen just across the border. Although most of the refugees were farmers who found refuge in rural areas, there was one important exception. Thuo (Figure 1) was host to some 10,000 refugees from Yekepa, a mining town just three kilometres across the border in Liberia, where industrial workers from all over Liberia were employed. Many of them fled to Thuo and settled just across the border close to the customs post, where a *de facto* refugee camp sprang up

almost overnight. The refugees in Thuo were ethnically and socially very different from the other refugees and from the host population.

The Second Wave: Urban Refugees or Returnees? (May–June 1990)

Between May and June 1990, when the NPFL advanced through Liberia and progressively took over the cities, large numbers of Mandingo people fled to Guinea, where they are called 'Conianke' or 'Malenke'. The Mandingo have Guinean roots. Many had moved to Liberia during the 1960s and 1970s to trade. They fled back to Guinea by road, carrying considerable amounts of belongings. During the same period, many Mandingo and Krahn found refuge in Sierra Leone (Leach 1992). Unlike the rural refugees, they did not flee the Liberian army but the NPFL, which considered them as enemies since they had supported President Samuel Doe. On 5 January 1990, at the very start of the war, in an attempt to broaden his popular base, Samuel Doe had declared that 'all those Mandingo residing in Liberia would be considered to be Liberian citizens'. The Mandingo moved to the towns, mainly N'Zérékoré and Macenta, which already had large Mandingo communities, mainly engaged in trade. Others continued to Beyla and *Haute Guinée*, from where they originated (Wave 2 in Figure 1). From the beginning, doubts were raised about their actual refugee status and about their needs for assistance, as compared to the first wave of refugees or to the host population. UNHCR proposed to classify them as returnees rather than as refugees. The Government of Guinea, however, considered it unacceptable to make a distinction between rural and urban refugees. For them this amounted to a choice based on ethnic criteria rather than on needs. The Government of Guinea and UNHCR decided that refugee assistance would be limited to the Forest Region. Refugees moving outside the Forest Region would receive no help except for assistance with transport. The consequence was that most refugees remained in, or moved to, the Forest Region. The actual number of refugees outside this region was difficult to estimate, as they were never registered. Limiting refugee assistance to the Forest Region was one of the few decisions the central government ever took regarding refugees. The official reason was that the 'refugee system' established in the Forest Region was able to register and assist the refugees, and that there was thus no need to extend it to other regions. Consequently, all refugees arriving by boat in the capital, Conakry, were transported to the Forest Region. That refugees were confined to one remote region of the country was a welcome consequence, or according to some, the main reason for this political decision. Beyla prefecture, where some 30,000 Mandingo refugees had settled, was a borderline case. Beyla has no border with Liberia, but is administratively part of the Forest Region. Although most of these 'refugees' indeed returned from a more or less long stay in Liberia, they were registered as refugees in Beyla.

The Third Wave: Rural Refugees from Loffa County (June–August 1990)

In June 1990, fighting spread all over Liberia and in particular to Bong and Loffa counties. Some 20,000 refugees fled to west Yomou, some 13,000 to Macenta and some 16,000 to east Guéckédou (Wave 3 in Figure 1). These refugees were mainly Kpellé, Loma and Kissi. Most of the Gbande from Loffa county fled to the Mende areas of Sierra Leone (Figure 2).

By July 1990, the take-over of Monrovia by the NPFL looked imminent, and this prospect worried the governments of several West African countries. In August 1990, member states of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) decided to install an interim government and to deploy a Nigeria-led, multinational peacekeeping force named ECOMOG (ECOWAS Monitoring Group). ECOMOG stopped the take-over of Monrovia by the NPFL, but had little impact on the war outside the capital, where the NPFL controlled over 95 per cent of Liberia. ECOMOG's control was confined to Monrovia and a corridor along the coast, between Monrovia and Sierra Leone, allowing for the passage of refugees from Monrovia. As insecurity inside Liberia intensified, however, many refugees, both rural and urban, continued to arrive in Guinea, joining previous waves in their settlement areas. In the meanwhile, the NPFL split between the mainstream, headed by Charles Taylor, and a faction headed by Prince Johnson, the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL). Prince Johnson later abducted President Samuel Doe in September 1990 from the ECOMOG compound, and subsequently killed him (Schuster 1994). During this period, several humanitarian agencies provided aid in the territory controlled by the NPFL, as well as in Monrovia itself. These efforts contributed to keep a large proportion of the population inside Liberia, whether still living in their homes, or as internally displaced people.

The Fourth Wave: Refugees from Sierra Leone (March–April 1991)

In early 1991, the Liberian conflict spilled over into Sierra Leone. El Hadj Kouroumah, a Liberian Mandingo opposed to the NPFL, organized Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone, including remnants of the Armed Forces of Liberia, into a new Liberian guerrilla force, the United Liberation Movement (ULIMO). Thomas Sankoh, a Sierra Leonean opposition leader, allied to the NPFL, had created the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). In March 1991, the NPFL and RUF launched an offensive against ULIMO and penetrated well into Sierra Leone. The whole border area between Liberia and Sierra Leone became battle zones for Liberian factions (ULIMO and NPFL), and Sierra Leoneans (RUF and the Sierra Leonean army), who fought each other and forged unstable alliances (Richards 1996, Leach 1992). The consequence for Guinea was another massive influx of some 100,000 new refugees (Wave 4 in Figure 1), mainly Sierra Leoneans from the Kissi and Mende groups. Most arrived in Guéckédou prefecture in March and April

Table 1

Overview of Refugees Arriving in Guinea, 1990–91

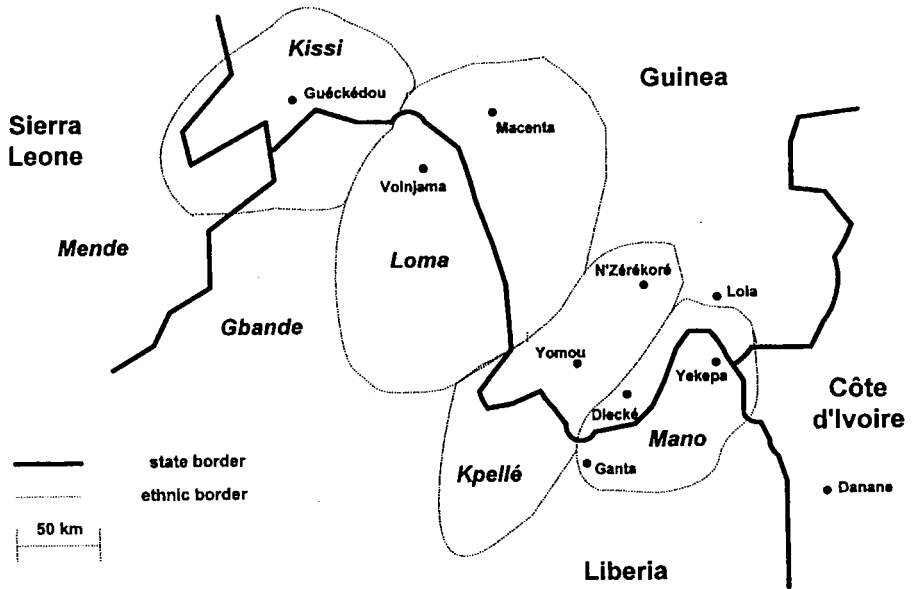
Origin (Figure 2)	Estimated numbers and status at arrival	Settlement area in Guinea (Figure 1)	Mode of settling
Wave 1 or Nimba wave, January–March, 1990			
Rural Mano from Nimba county	100,000; destitute, in good general condition	Rural border areas of Yomou, N'Zérékoré and Lola	Self-settlement among kinsmen; <i>de facto</i> camp at Thou (10,000)
Wave 2 or urban wave, May–August, 1990			
Urban Mandingo from cities throughout Liberia	100,000; carrying many belongings, in good general condition	Macenta city and N'Zérékoré city. Many migrated to Beyla and <i>Haute Guinée</i> , where they had their roots	Self-settlement among kinsmen
Wave 3 or Loffa wave, June–August, 1990			
Rural Kpellé, Loma and Kissi from Loffa and Bong counties	50,000; destitute, in good general condition	Rural area of Yomou (Kpellé), Macenta (Loma) and Guéckédou (Kissi)	Self-settlement among kinsmen
Wave 4 or Sierra Leone wave, March–April, 1991			
Rural Kissi and Mende from Sierra Leone, and rural Gbande from Liberia	100,000; destitute, more malnourished, but still in fairly good general condition	Rural areas of Guéckédou	Kissi: self-settlement among kinsmen. Mende and Gbande: 'guided self-settlement' in rural areas, but not among kinsmen; <i>de facto</i> camp at Kouloumba (26,000)

A Period of Relative Tranquillity (mid-1991 till mid-1992)

From mid-1991 till mid-1992, there was a relative stability inside Liberia and Sierra Leone. There were no major military movements and tensions eased in most areas. Peace talks went on in both countries, but no solutions were found. Humanitarian aid could reach large areas. Consequently, there were no important influxes of new refugees in Guinea. This did not, however, preclude

Figure 2

Ethnic Groups Living on Both Sides of Borders of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone



1991. Among them were also Liberian Gbände who had first found refuge in Sierra Leone. When their hosts had to flee, they joined them in their flight to Guinea. They settled in Guéckédou prefecture, where they largely outnumbered their hosts. The Kissi settled mainly in Guéckédou. Some 20,000 Mende refugees first settled in the Kelema isthmus of Guinea that protrudes into Sierra Leone. They could only be reached by foot along an 18-kilometre trail and were the target of guerrilla raids from Sierra Leone. The Guinean authorities decided that these refugees should move out of the isthmus. As a result, an estimated 26,000 refugees congregated at Kouloumba, a place with a resident population of not more than one thousand, creating a *de facto* refugee camp. To reach the refugee-affected areas from Guéckédou city one had to drive for five or six hours over a badly maintained dirt road. This influx over a short period was massive. The Government of Guinea and UNHCR were, by then, more active in assistance. They were involved in deciding where groups of refugees could settle. Moreover, the nutritional and health status of the new refugees was worse than those in previous waves, although still far from being dramatic. Spontaneous coping mechanisms were less efficient than before. For some of these refugees, the mode of settling in could be described as 'guided self-settlement'. Each of the four major waves was quite homogeneous, but there were important differences between them (Table 1).

considerable population movements both inside and between the countries. These movements depended mainly on the security situation and the agricultural season. Whenever the security situation allowed it, refugees returned to their area of origin. They feared that prolonged absence would jeopardize their right to their land and property. Often the men went first, leaving women and children in Guinea, where they lived in security and could get some aid. During the planting season, people tried to farm their land. At the same time, others, who had stayed inside their country, judged that the situation had become too difficult, and moved to Guinea. Overall, however, the number of refugees in Guinea was not increasing; on the contrary, it began to decrease. The official registration data did not adequately reflect these movements. The dispersed settlement pattern and the refugee movements made accurate refugee registration virtually impossible. In the absence of an official repatriation programme, refugees who returned to their country of origin did not notify UNHCR. New refugees tried to get registered, but were often—sometimes rightly—suspected of trying to register for a second time. During this relatively stable period, hope existed for definitive peace agreements for Liberia and Sierra Leone and the possible repatriation of the refugees (UNHCR 1991). Nevertheless, everybody started acknowledging that longer-term assistance approaches should be adopted, including more support for economic self-sufficiency (Diallo 1991).

Late Arrivals: The Subsequent Minor Waves (1992–95)

Context

Towards the end of 1992, there was still no progress in the peace process in Liberia. Internal strife within the NPFL and ULIMO resulted in their further splitting up into different factions and new upsurges of fighting between them. In September 1994, this culminated in a ULIMO assault on the NPFL headquarters in Gbarnga, and its subsequent recapture by the NPFL, followed by a major offensive of the NPFL in ULIMO-controlled territory. In Sierra Leone, the situation was hardly any better. The conflict spread over large areas, and forced many people to leave their homes, and either concentrate around cities, or flee to Guinea. During this period, the level of violence was increasing, giving rise to some of the most horrifying human rights violations documented in recent history (Omaar 1990, Schuster 1994), most notably the systematic cutting off of both hands of groups of peasant women (Amnesty International 1996, Richards 1996). All factions widely practised the scorched earth strategy, and this disrupted food security inside Liberia and Sierra Leone. At the same time, humanitarian agencies faced serious difficulties bringing relief and in certain places, real famine prevailed. The refugees who had arrived in Guinea in 1990–91 fared relatively well. There were no 'lacrimogenic' situations of extreme destitution nor famine. The feeling was that 'refugees were integrated'. There was thus little media presence and less donor interest in these refugees.

Moreover, lack of reliable refugee registration and fraud with food aid were perceived as major problems. Therefore, donors were pushing UNHCR and WFP to improve control mechanisms and to reduce food aid.

Cross-border Movements in Both Directions

Because of the degradation of the situation inside Liberia and Sierra Leone, new refugees started trickling into Guinea. No further major waves occurred, rather a series of minor waves. For those arriving at this late moment, fleeing to Guinea was not their first choice. They had tried to hang on as long as possible. When asked why they had not left their country earlier, they often answered that they lived far from the border, and first had tried to cope somewhere closer to home; that they had never been to and did not know anybody in Guinea, or that they did not know where to go in Guinea. Others stressed that fleeing outside the country would jeopardize their future inside their home country once the problems were solved. The result was that they first tried to continue living in their villages, facing hardship, or moved around inside Liberia or Sierra Leone. It was only when these options became really impossible that they decided to flee to Guinea. Most refugees arriving in 1992–95 had thus already been internally displaced. Some had moved several times. Most had suffered several years of extreme hardship, close to forced labour or even slavery, inside their country. Consequently, more and more refugees were malnourished and sick upon arrival, without belongings, or even clothing. Family units were often split, with many families headed by women. Many of the refugees had no place to go to in Guinea, were exhausted on arrival and had little energy left to develop creative coping mechanisms. This fundamental difference between early and late arrivals is a clear illustration of Kunz's variety of 'refugee waves and vintages' (Kunz 1973, 1981), and has also been documented in South Sudan (Harrell-Bond 1986) and in East Sudan (Mulholland 1985; Kuhlman 1990). Whenever the situation allowed, refugees returned to their country of origin—temporarily or permanently. When the security situation improved, the movement went mainly towards the country of origin. When insecurity increased, it was the other way round.

Three Examples of Minor Waves and the 'New Relief Approach'

One can distinguish more than ten different waves with some 150,000 new refugees during 1992–95. Most arrived in the prefectures of Yomou, Macenta and Guéckédou, which already hosted the highest number of refugees. When the conflict spread over larger areas of Sierra Leone in 1995, refugees also arrived in new areas in Guinea; some 9,000 refugees settled in Kissidougou and another 24,000 settled in Forécariah, along the coast. The refugee influxes in Guéckédou (June 1993), in Yomou (September 1994) and in Forécariah (January 1995) are discussed here. These influxes were among the most

Table 2

Overview of Three Minor Waves of Late Arrivals, Guinea, 1992–95

Provoking event	Estimated number and/or status at arrival	Settlement area in Guinea and mode of settling in
New refugees in Guéckédou, June 1993		
Fighting in Kailahun area (Sierra Leone) and Loffa county (Liberia)	In very poor condition; with high malnutrition rates	Arrived in border area of Guéckédou; soon moved by UNHCR to small camps (e.g. Nyaedou and Fandouyema) with good access to land
From Gbarnga to Noonah, Yomou, September–December, 1994		
Attack by ULIMO on NPFL head-quarters at Gbarnga	27,000 refugees, generally in poor condition	First in transit camps: Diecké, Bignamou and Betha (Yomou); in January 1995, moved by UNHCR to Noonah with poor access to land (only some 8,000 accepted, rest self-settled, but unassisted)
From Kambia to Forécariah, January, 1995		
Attack on Kambia by RUF	24,000 refugees, in good health	Forécariah, self-settlement among kinsmen, later 'encouraged' by UNHCR to move to camps

important of the minor waves and illustrate the changing nature of the refugee population, as well as the changing response of the relief system (Table 2).

New Refugees in Guéckédou (June 1993). In June 1993, several groups of refugees arrived in Guéckédou prefecture and settled down just across the border. They were in a bad shape and totally destitute. UNHCR established several small camps, for 1,000–3,000 people each, far away from the border (e.g. at Nyaedou, Fandouyema and Boodou). UNHCR negotiated access to land for the refugees in Nyaedou and Boodou and assisted them with its exploitation. UNHCR made settlement in the new camps a condition for registration and further assistance. Despite this, many refugees preferred self-settlement without assistance, joining the ranks of previous refugees amongst whom they judged they had better chances of coping. Moreover, many refugees who officially registered in camps, did not permanently reside there ('ghost camp').

From Gbarnga to Noonah, Yomou (September–December 1994). After the assault by ULIMO on the headquarters of the NPFL at Gbarnga, an estimated

27,000 new refugees arrived in Yomou prefecture in September 1994. Many, including adults, were severely malnourished. They constituted a very diverse group. Many were former urban dwellers from different ethnic groups. At short notice, UNHCR and WFP made emergency food supplies available and constructed transit camps in Diecké, Bignamou and Betha. In November 1994, UNHCR built a new camp in Noonah. However, the new camp remained almost empty till UNHCR made living in Noonah camp a precondition for registration. Nevertheless, many refugees refused to move. Most of the forest around Noonah is part of the Sacred Forest, where only people initiated through local rites may enter. Only 8,000 refugees accepted the move, as they had hardly any access to farmland or labour opportunities. The remainder, some 19,000, refused to move to Noonah, knowing that they were not entitled to free food or free medical care. They became officially unregistered refugees. This is a case of 'informed consent to non-assistance' because the preconditions unilaterally imposed by UNHCR were not acceptable to the refugees. This refusal was partly because of the bad track record the relief system had in the eyes of many refugees. The refugees did not trust UNHCR and its implementing agencies when they promised that refugees would get full relief rations in Noonah camp. Previously, they had indeed not received food supplies as scheduled. Many refugees judged rightly that their chances to develop economic self-sufficiency in Noonah camp were slim, and preferred to count more on themselves than on the relief system and thus opted out of it. UNHCR was so strict because it could not distinguish between 'real new refugees' and 'false new refugees' (be it refugees trying to register twice or Guineans trying to get registered as refugees). The physical separation of the new refugees from the old ones was indeed a solution to this problem, as very few 'false new refugees' would ever accept to move to Noonah camp. However, it also excluded from registration a large number of 'real new refugees'. The refugees who opted out were probably those who had better chances of coping and becoming self-sufficient. Many who settled in Noonah camp, moved later back to where they had first settled, or moved into the Guinean villages around Noonah, only returning to the camp on the days of food distribution. During 1995, events proved that the refugees who refused to move to Noonah camp were right. Although Noonah camp was prioritized for food distributions, these were insufficient and malnutrition became highly prevalent. In 1995, the situation deteriorated in many areas, but in Noonah camp the situation was worse than elsewhere, and took longer to redress. This opting out from the relief system has also been observed in other refugee situations (Harrell-Bond 1986; Bascom 1995; Van Damme 1995).

From Kambia to Forécariah (January 1995). In January 1995, an attack by the RUF on Kambia forced some 24,000 Sierra Leoneans to flee to Forécariah, near Conakry. Although most of the refugees were in good health, few carried any provisions. The refugees settled in areas inhabited by their kinsmen, with whom they had maintained close relations. This influx closely resembled the first and third waves of 1990, with rural refugees in good health and coping

relatively well. In June 1995, UNHCR encouraged the refugees in Forécariah to move to camps. The refugees were told that food and medical assistance would only be provided in the camps. By November 1995, most refugees had moved, although they had previously lived among the Guineans without major problems. This policy was thus in line with the more interventionist relief approach in the Forest Region, although the needs of these refugees did not require it.

These three examples show that the results of the 'new relief approach' were quite different from one place to another. In Guéckédou, the new relief approach was reasonably effective, but was undoubtedly more expensive than the previous one. At Noonah in Yomou, it was a complete failure. In Forécariah, resettling refugees in camps was unnecessary and costly.

Early Arrivals (1990–91) versus Late Arrivals (1992–95)

The refugees who arrived in 1990–91 were fundamentally different from those who came in 1992–95. The needs of the late arrivals were greater while the efficiency of their own coping mechanisms decreased. Table 3 compares the main characteristics of the early and the late arrivals. Not only did the nature of the refugees and the attitude of the hosts evolve over time, so did the general attitude and the preparedness of the relief system. The role of the relief system increased. In terms of refugee livelihood, there was a shift from self-supporting to relying on assistance from outsiders. To a certain extent, this change in approach was an understandable response to the changing conditions of the refugees. But the change in policy was not necessarily appropriate, as illustrated earlier.

Settlement Patterns of Refugees

The Number and Distribution of Refugees

In mid-1995, there were 603,750 refugees officially registered with UNHCR in Guinea, 578,846 in the Forest Region alone. The World Refugee Survey estimated the number of refugees in Guinea at 640,000 at the end of 1995 (Immigration and Refugee Services of America 1996). Both numbers were roughly equivalent to 10 per cent of the total population of Guinea. This was one of the highest refugee concentrations of any country in the world, second only to Jordan. At the end of 1995, one in every three inhabitants of the Forest Region was a refugee. UNHCR made a distinction between refugees registered in 1990–93 and those registered in 1994–95, the former being identified as the 'old' refugees, the latter as the 'new' refugees. This distinction did not coincide entirely with the distinction between early arrivals (1990–91) and late arrivals (1992–95). Old and new refugees were entitled to different quantities of food, the assumption being that the old refugees were self-sufficient by 1996, but that new refugees were not. This distinction was maintained despite studies showing

Table 3

Characteristics of the Refugees and their Reception, Guinea, 1990–95

Early arrivals, 1990–91
Four major waves

Late arrivals, 1992–95
Subsequent minor waves

Nature of the refugees

When hostilities reached their area of residence, people fled to Guinea as a first choice. They lived close to the border and had ethnic links, often family, in Guinea.

When hostilities reached their area of residence, people first struggled to remain within their country. Only when this became impossible, they fled to Guinea (internally displaced, then refugees). Sometimes they included refugees who had returned to their country but had to flee again (refugees, returnees, and then re-refugees).

General condition of the refugees

Refugees did not suffer prolonged or serious hardship before arriving in Guinea and were generally in good condition.

Many refugees arrived malnourished, and in poor health. Many families were split before arrival.

Refugees arrived in relatively homogeneous groups of people of the same ethnic group who had lived together before the conflict.

Refugees arrived in heterogeneous groups of mixed ethnicity that did not originally live together.

Characteristics of the reception in the host area

The refugees arrived in areas inhabited by relatives and where no refugees had yet arrived. The reception of the refugees by the host population was in general very generous.

The host population was already supporting large numbers of refugees. Kinship relations between newly arrived refugees and their hosts were weak or non-existent. The hosts often considered areas of arrival 'saturated' with refugees.

The aid system was not yet in place in the area of arrival and no registration of refugees had taken place previously.

The relief system was already in place and earlier arrivals had been registered. 'Registration = food aid' logic was already installed.

Most refugees did not expect relief, nor did their hosts.

As internally displaced, some refugees had already received food aid. On arrival in Guinea they expected the 'international community' to take care of them. The local population and the refugees already present counted on aid from the relief system for the new refugees.

Mode of settlement in the host area

Self-settlement among host population. Refugees mixed with existing population in the border areas. After some weeks or months, they constructed their own houses, often spatially integrated in existing villages, or in paired villages.

UNHCR tried to keep old and new refugees separate. It prepared camp sites at a distance from the border (e.g. Kamayan, Nyaedou, Boodou and Noonah) and new refugees had to settle there to be registered. The populations of these camps were mixed and were supported by the relief system. After some time, these camps often became 'ghost camps': refugees were often absent, searching for employment opportunities elsewhere. Vulnerable refugees and dependants often remained in the camps. When food distributions took place, refugees returned to the camps.

that food insecurity was not linked to time of arrival but to area of residence (Davis 1996). The concentration of refugees was different from one prefecture to another. In Guéckédou in mid-1995, there were more refugees than Guineans. The concentrations were also very high in Yomou and Macenta. Within the prefectures refugee concentrations also varied.

'Integration' of Urban Refugees

Approximately 30 per cent of the refugees, mainly Mandingo, settled in the major urban centres: N'Zérékoré, Guéckédou and Macenta. Since their roots were in Guinea, their status as refugees or returnees remained a matter of discussion. The Mandingo, whether 'refugees', 'returnees' or 'citizens', dominated trade in the cities. Their arrival from Liberia transformed the cities of the Forest Region. Since 1990, the number of cars in the cities at least tripled or quadrupled. The refugees brought many of these cars, but often had to sell them when their resources dwindled. These refugees were integrated in the economic life of the cities. The sudden increase of Mandingo further marginalized the forest tribes (Mano, Kpellé, Loma and Kissi) economically. It also exacerbated pre-existing ethnic tensions in Guinea. The forest tribes were loyal to the NPFL that had persecuted the Mandingo in Liberia. In June 1991, ethnic tensions between Kpellé and Mandingo escalated in N'Zérékoré and resulted in clashes which caused some 200 deaths. Also in Macenta, tensions between the Mandingo, locally known as Tomamania, and the Loma increased. Several hundreds of people were killed. At the same time, political liberalization made the forest tribes more vocal and their domination of certain city councils, namely in N'Zérékoré, strengthened their political position. In the cities, there were serious problems with over-registration of refugees. Many merchants and local authorities acquired ration cards, in certain cases for several groups of 50 beneficiaries. The urban Mandingo refugees were the most outspoken and politically aware section of the refugee population. When food distributions became irregular, the urban refugees staged protests at the UNHCR offices. When food aid only trickled in, as was the case throughout 1995, there was political pressure to favour distributions to the urban refugees to avoid tensions in the cities. Most urban refugees managed relatively well, at least economically. Still, they lost a lot through their forced migration to Guinea. Many Mandingo were killed in Liberia, and part of their property was looted or destroyed. Some became destitute, lost their social network and became pauperized urban dwellers.

Rural Refugees: Between 'Integration' and 'Segregation'

Settlement Patterns and Self-sufficiency. In the rural areas, different settlement patterns can be distinguished. Many refugees lived within Guinean villages. For an outsider it was difficult to distinguish them from Guineans. This pattern can be called *spatial integration*. Other refugees lived in 'paired villages': the

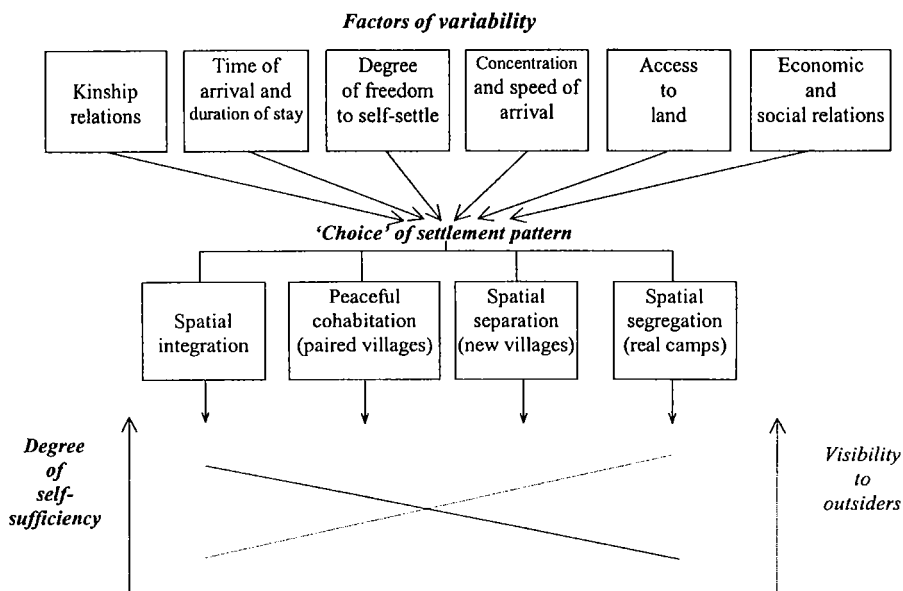
refugees created a settlement close to an existing village with which they enjoyed good relations. This can be called *peaceful cohabitation*. Other refugees lived in 'new villages', situated rather close to an existing village with the possibility of social and economic relations, but with a distinct identity (*spatial separation*). At the extreme of the spectrum, some refugees were living in 'real camps'. Although not intended as such, this situation could be qualified as *spatial segregation*.

Relative Importance of the Different Settlement Patterns. Guéckédou was the prefecture with the highest density of refugees, and the highest number of real camps. A detailed analysis of the situation in Guéckédou at the end of 1995 clarified the quantitative importance of the different settlement patterns. According to the health workers' data, 90,790 (33 per cent) of the 273,388 refugees officially registered in Guéckédou at the end of 1995 were living in 45 'camps'. Two-thirds of the refugees were not living in camps, but were integrated within the local population, or living in settlements with less than 300 inhabitants. In other prefectures, the proportion of refugees living in camps was still lower. Moreover, refugees officially registered in camps were often not residing in them, but settled among the Guineans. They returned to the camp when food distributions took place. This phenomenon was especially noticeable during the rainy season, when agricultural labour was in high demand. Camps were then often largely abandoned with only a few people present, the remainder having settled on a semi-permanent basis in villages outside the camp. With many houses closed or collapsing, and vegetation growing wildly, these camps were called 'ghost camps'. One could roughly estimate that less than 20 per cent of the refugees of the Forest Region were living in real camps, some 25 per cent in new or paired villages, and over half were fully integrated in Guinean villages and towns. The degree of homogeneity of the refugees within these different situations varied considerably. 'Spatial integration' and 'peaceful cohabitation' were usually rather homogeneous situations: refugees with close kinship relations to the Guineans settled freely among their kin. 'Spatial separation' and 'spatial segregation' situations were often more heterogeneous, constituted of a mix of different ethnic groups distinct from the host population.

Why such Different Settlement Patterns? These settlement patterns resulted from a number of factors (Figure 3).

- kinship between the refugees and the host population, itself ethnically diverse
- time of arrival and duration of stay of the refugees in Guinea
- degree of *laisser-faire* or steering of the situation by UNHCR, and thus the degree of freedom the refugees had to self-settle
- concentration of refugees and speed of arrival
- pattern of land use and possibilities of access to land for the refugees

Figure 3
Settlement Pattern and Self-sufficiency of the Rural Refugees, Guinea, 1990-95



—intensity of social and economic relations between the refugees and the host population

Consequences for Self-sufficiency. Most rural refugees were farmers. In Guinea, most became landless. The local communities own the land, even if not in use. Not only for land, but also for common property resources, such as wood or even thatch for their houses, the refugees needed permission from the Guineans. The refugees depended thus to a large degree on good relations with the host communities. The refugees were often employed on a daily basis by the Guineans to work as agricultural labourers. Others got access to land that normally would have been left fallow. The refugees could initially use such land for one year, as an exceptional measure. The Guineans perceived the presence of refugees as a temporary phenomenon. Only a few refugees got the permission to clear forest and cultivate new land. From 1995, UNHCR negotiated with local communities to grant access to unused swamps for the refugee communities. The self-sufficiency of the refugees depended thus not only on the agricultural resources available in the area, but also on the access granted by the Guineans. This depended very much on the settlement pattern (Figure 3). The refugees who could integrate in local communities enjoyed a higher degree of self-sufficiency. Their means of livelihood were intertwined

with those of the host community. They shared the lives of the Guineans, worked on their farms and participated fully in the rural subsistence economy. Over time, the refugees living in paired villages or in the new villages also developed a high degree of economic self-sufficiency. As they settled freely, they usually spread themselves well enough to have access to economic opportunities. Those living segregated in camps faced the most serious problems. Both their population density and their isolation from the host society made their economic integration difficult. They often moved out of the camps to live in a more integrated way.

'The Refugees' are Living in 'Camps'. Contrary to the diverse reality described above, staff of aid agencies and government bodies tended to speak of 'the refugees' without making any distinction. The name given to a refugee settlement was invariably the name of a Guinean village with the suffix 'camp'. For example, Noonah is a small Guinean village, and the refugee camp was called Noonah camp. But also in Badou, where one hundred refugees lived in huts on one side of the village, the refugee quarter was called Badou camp. All refugee settlements, paired villages, new villages or real camps were invariably referred to as 'camps'. To some extent this was a way to distinguish the host population from the refugees, but the relatively small proportion of refugees living in real camps, and more visible to outsiders (Figure 3) shaped strongly the image aid workers and government officials had of all the refugees. For humanitarian agencies, this lack of visibility of the better-integrated refugees influenced their general perception of the refugees. 'Putting all refugees in the same bag' obscured the fact that the coping mechanisms of the refugees and the degree of self-sufficiency achieved differed strongly between refugee communities.

Conclusion

The refugees in Guinea arrived in different waves between 1990 and 1995, and most settled freely among the host population. They constituted a variety of settlement patterns ranging from spatial integration to spatial segregation. Among the determinants of settlement pattern, rural or urban origin, ethnic links and availability of agricultural resources were the most important. The settlement pattern determined largely the degree of self-sufficiency the refugees could reach. These complex and diverse settlement patterns, and the different levels of self-sufficiency that resulted from them, were not sufficiently acknowledged by the aid agencies. This would, however, be important to offer assistance complementary to the refugees' own coping mechanisms. Or as Amartya Sen states: 'There is no substitute for doing a serious economic analysis of the entitlements of all the vulnerable groups' (Sen 1990).

- BASCOM, J.** (1995) 'The New Nomads: An Overview of Involuntary Migration in Africa', in Baker, J. and Aina, T. A. (eds.) *The Migration Experience in Africa*, Sweden: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, pp. 197–219.
- DAVIS, A.** (1996) 'Review of the Programme of Food Assistance to Liberian and Sierra Leonean Refugees in Guinea', report of a consultancy mission conducted by Médecins sans Frontières (December 1995), Brussels: MSF.
- DIALLO, M. A.** (1991) 'Réflexion et suggestion sur la stratégie de la transition de "l'assistance d'urgence" aux "programmes de développement" au profit des réfugiés libériens et sierra léonais', Report for the World Food Programme Guinea Bureau, N'Zérékoré.
- HARRELL-BOND, B. E.** (1986) *Imposing Aid: Emergency Assistance to Refugees*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE SERVICES OF AMERICA** (1996) *World Refugee Survey 1996*, Washington: USCR.
- KUHLMAN, T.** (1990) *Burden or Boon? A Study of Eritrean Refugees in the Sudan*, Amsterdam: VU University Press.
- KUNZ, E. F.** (1973) 'The Refugee in Flight: Kinetic Models and Forms of Displacement', *International Migration Review* 125–146.
- (1981) 'Exile and Resettlement: Refugee Theory', *International Migration Review* 15: 42–51.
- LEACH, M.** (1992) *Dealing with Displacement: Refugee–Host Relations, Food and Forest Resources in Sierra Leonean Mende Communities during the Liberian Influx, 1990–91*, Sussex: Institute of Development Studies.
- MULHOLLAND, K.** (1985) 'Cholera in Sudan: An Account of an Epidemic in a Refugee Camp in Eastern Sudan, May–June 1985', *Disasters* 9: 247–258.
- OMAAAR, R.** (1990) *Liberia: Flight from Terror: Testimony of Abuses in Nimba County*, New York, Washington, London: Human Rights Watch.
- RICHARDS, P.** (1996) *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth and Resources in Sierra Leone*, Oxford: The International African Institute.
- SCHUSTER, L.** (1994) 'The Final Days of Dr Doe', in Buford, B. (ed.) *Africa*, London: Granta, pp. 39–95.
- SEN, A.** (1990) 'Food, Economics, and Entitlements', in Drèze, J. and Sen, A. (eds.) *The Political Economy of Hunger. Volume 1. Entitlement and Well-Being*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 34–52.
- UNHCR** (1991) 'Draft Contingency Plan for the Repatriation Operation to Liberia', Conakry: UNHCR.
- VAN DAMME, W.** (1995) 'Do Refugees Belong in Camps? Experiences from Goma and Guinea', *Lancet* 346: 360–362.