



Housing and reintegration of amputees and war-wounded in Sierra Leone

by Elise Schanke

A decade of civil conflict has left a trail of human devastation in Sierra Leone. The rebels' trademark of severing of limbs of innocent civilians has left thousands of amputees and war-wounded, most of whom face an unforgiving future with slim chances of securing an income for themselves and their families.

Many of the amputees have experienced humiliation and discrimination. In many parts of Africa, especially in remote areas, it is common to believe that diseases and handicaps are caused by evil spirits or witchcraft. Amputees and war-wounded are hence not only regarded as rebel victims but also as victims of demons/evil spirits. Without shelter and aid, many of them are subjected to a life as outcasts, abandoned by families and friends. The Norwegian government has provided approximately \$1.5 million for the amputees/war-wounded in Sierra Leone. The assistance has been channelled via the Norwegian Refugee Council.

The need for shelter

In NRC's needs assessment in July 2000 in the Murray Town camp (near Freetown) for amputees and severely war-wounded, most respondents ranked shelter second only to food as their most pressing need. Providing shelter has proved vital in terms of enhancing the victims' self-esteem and motivating them to work towards self-reliance. It is of great importance, therefore, that these vulnerable groups are prioritised by organisations when launching low-cost housing programmes. If not explicitly targeted, they are usually unable to participate in such programmes because of conditions set requiring input of capital and labour.

A project designed by NRC in consultation with the National Commission for Rehabilitation,

Reconstruction and Resettlement (NCRRR)¹ and the amputees/war-wounded themselves has provided shelter, resettlement and reintegration support for registered IDPs living in the Murray Town and Grafton camps. The philosophy of the project is: a house is more than a physical structure – it also symbolises identity and belonging.

Four representatives from the target beneficiaries became members of the project's coordination committee, in which NCRRR and UNOCHA also participated. Two of the local committee members became close implementing partners. Cause Canada² has funded reintegration services to all beneficiaries and Father Maurizio Boa has provided funds for some of the houses, furniture and wells in the resettlement communities. The project's successful implementation is in large part due to effective teamwork within the committee.

To date, 420 individuals and their families – in total about 4,200 persons – have been resettled in 50 locations in new homes and provided with reintegration support.

As word spreads that agencies are providing housing and assistance for camp amputees and war-wounded, other war victims – some seriously disabled and traumatised – emerge from hiding, seeking help. In addition, many amputees and war-wounded have returned from Guinea or Liberia. NRC is calling on donors to assist these 'hidden' IDPs and returnees. Unfortunately, the target group seems to fall between two strands of funding: relief work and long-term development. So far, only Father Maurizio has responded



Two of the youngest beneficiaries of the NRC housing, resettlement and reintegration project.

positively with funds for 85 more houses to be built.

Lessons learned

Effective multi-agency shelter programmes for amputees and war-wounded require:

- transparency in selection of programme beneficiaries
- extensive collaboration and teamwork
- close collaboration with the target group from the very beginning, and participation when possible throughout; for example, the amputee/war-wounded Drama Group played an important role in the sensitisation seminars in the communities as well as in the HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns.
- knowledge of the behaviour of people suffering from physical handicaps and post-war traumas
- cultural sensitivity
- knowledge of local social fabrics.

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¹ Now renamed the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA): www.nacsa-sl.org

² www.cryfreetown.org/CauseSierraLeone.htm