

**NARRATIVES OF HOPE?
DISPLACEMENT NARRATIVES OF LIBERIAN REFUGEE
WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN THE GOMOA-BUDUMBURAM
REFUGEE CAMP IN GHANA**

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Trondheim, May 2005

Dedication

*To my dearest mum, **Leticia Amene Tete**, I am all I am because of you. I could not have asked for a more dedicated and loving mother!...well maa, to your memory then, keep safe in Jehovah's memory until we meet in Paradise (John 5:28,29)*

To my dear sisters Ruth, Julie and their families, for holding the fort and not taking no for an answer

To Annabella for sticking closer than a sister...what self-sacrificing love & a large heart you have got!

To Uncle Nick and Maa Felicia, for overwhelming me with loving support!

To Dela for his diligence in canvassing for this space...what a friend you have been!

Acknowledgements

The Greatest Thanks goes to my loving father, Jehovah God, for all the training that has brought me thus far. Without your unwavering support through thin and thick, I would not have made it. I owe it all to you.

To my dear supervisor, Ragnhild Lund. This is the result of your knowledgeable suggestions and unrelenting but constructive provocations/criticisms for my own good. Tusen takk for your warm encouragement throughout the research process. You made me believe I can do it!

I am most grateful to my kind research participants for courageously sharing their lives with me. Without your brave stories, there would be no Narratives. Thank you so much. Hats off to all the “Gatekeepers” and key informants for granting me easy access and sharing your insights on various issues of concern. I make special mention of Mr. Bawumia, Ms. Lisa Quarshie, Needa Jehu-Appiah, Jane Mugai, Dorothy Kumah, Alice Abrahams, May Moisemo, Washington-King, Evangeline Martin, Alice Apronti, Sarah Adu, Mr. (s) Andy Fiadome, Thompson, Atta-Mens, Obidieh, Hinnah, Bah, Besmon Best, Toombay, Tailey, Ebo Biney and all who helped in various ways. I really appreciate your kind assistance.

Mange Takk to Catherine Brun and Nina Birkeland of the Research Group on Forced Migration (IDP Network), NTNU for the brainstorming sessions and useful recommended reading materials. I wish to thank all the academic staff, especially Stig, M. Jones and Anne-Sophie Lægrand. Thanks Markus Steen for all the practical assistance, understanding support and encouragement.

Thanks to my dedicated senior research assistant, Mr. Enoch Quayson for displacing himself over such a distance just to help! Same to my dear sisters cum research assistants, Zipporah, Hannah and Patience. I am grateful to my dear brothers in Budumburam Congregation for warmly hosting me and making me feel welcome. Merci, Bro. Zon & family for the photographs and the warm hospitality.

To my dear “mum” Barbara for all the loving care during those sick moments and for the gift; my “T”sis Susanne for the sisterly/intellectual support; to min stor brör & Elizabeth for always listening; to Ola og Filip for the editorial work... all my dear brothers in Trondheim English for providing me a “home away from home” and making my stay such a pleasure! May Jehovah Bless you abundantly! To Michel, Eugene, Divine (& families) for inviting me over and for all the encouraging calls. To all my dear brothers, sisters, family and friends for your loving support and encouragement all through the years. Thanks you so much!

Many Thanks to my dear colleagues, Benedicta, Sanyu, Ephraim, Kellen for the proofreading and tedious editorial work. To Christcola and the entire class of 2003, it would have been incomplete without you. Thanks for the conducive environment throughout our study period.

I wish to thank the staff at the International House, especially Turid, Ragnhild and Gro for all the hard work in making us comfortable. Thanks to the Educational Loan Fund for the financial support throughout my study programme. Any errors, either of omission or commission, are entirely the responsibility of the researcher.

Abstract

The refugee problem is a canker in contemporary human affairs without the “limboness” that protractedness adds to it. Yet many refugee situations, especially in Africa, become forgotten emergencies as women assume new roles both at the family and community level whilst children are born and bred in camps which were meant to be temporary in the first place.

This study explores the life situation of Liberian Refugee Women and Children in their 15-year stay at the Gomoa Budumburam Refugee Settlement in Ghana. It examines the livelihood means they employ as a means of coping, emphasising their security and educational concerns. It touches on the challenges faced by camp children or the youth as they strive to deal with their situation and assign meaning to their lives. Actor-oriented theories help conceptualise ways in which the refugees display agency in mediating the structures that enable and/or constrain them in their protracted displacement. In view of the need to find solutions to the refugee problem, the three proposed durable solutions are examined in the light of the reasons informing refugees’ choice of one solution over the other. The concept of Space and Place help analyse the realities of the solutions available vis-à-vis the preferred choice of the refugees. Highlighting the importance of hearing refugees’ voice on problems and solutions they consider viable in their situation, a qualitative methodological approach is employed. Specifically, personal narratives collected during a six-week stay on the camp are the main source of data. This is complemented by observations, focus group discussion and key informant interviews as well as secondary data sources.

The analysis relates the data collected to the outlined objectives, research questions and theories. It brings to the fore the resourcefulness displayed by the refugees as they employ various strategies to cope on a short and long term basis. The study has also revealed the refugees’ ideas about “home” as where one makes it, rather than a nostalgic country of origin to which one must return for life to be complete. (S) GBV has been highlighted as an area needing more attention than that accorded it presently if the causes of women’s vulnerabilities are to be addressed in a wholesome way. Suggestions have then been made based on refugees’ recommendations as well as that of the organisations in place and the researcher’s.

KEY WORDS: Refugees, Protracted Displacement, Women and Children (Youth), Place, Agency

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AGREDS - Assemblies of God Relief and Development Services
AHEAD – Agency for Holistic Evangelism And Development
AIDS - Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome
AWDF - African Women’s Development Fund
B & C – Building and Construction
CBW – Children Better Way
CCG - Christian Council of Ghana
CEB – Central Education Board
CRA – Catholic Relief Agency
CWS – Church World Services
DAFI – The Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative Fund
ECOMOG – ECOWAS Military Observer Group
ECOWAS – Economic Community of West African States
EPAU – Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit, UNHCR
FGD - Focus Group Discussion
GAC - the Ghana AIDS Commission
GHANET - The Ghana HIV/AIDS Network
GPRTU - Ghana Private Road Transport Union
GPS – the Ghana Police Service
GRB – the Ghana Refugee Board
GRCS - the Ghana Red Cross Society
HIPC – Highly Indebted Poor Country
HIV - Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IDPs – Internally Displaced Persons
IGP – Inspector General of Police
IMR – International Migration Report
JSS – Junior Secondary School (Junior High)
KVIP – Kumasi Ventilated Improved Pit latrine
LIREWO - Liberian Refugee Women’s Organisation
LRWC - Liberian Refugee Welfare Council
NADMO – the National Disaster Management Organisation
NCS – the National Catholic Secretariat

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation
NMP - the National Mobilisation Programme
NWT- The Neighbourhood Watch Team
OAU- Organisation of African Unity
OPE – Overseas Processing Entity
PNDC - Provisional National Defense Council
PRO – Public Relations Officer
R & C - Ricerca and Cooperazione (An Italian NGO)
SHIFSD - Self-Help Initiative For Sustainable Development
SSS – Senior Secondary School (Senior High)
(S)GBV – (Sexual) Gender- based Violence
STDs – Sexually Transmitted Diseases
SWO - Social Welfare Officer
UN – United Nations
UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF – United Nations Children and Educational Fund
UN IMR – United Nations International Migration Report
US (A) – United States of America
VP - Vice President
VR - Voluntary Repatriation
WAEC – West Africa Examination Council
WESS – World Economic and Social Survey
WFP – the World Food Program
WISE – Women’s Initiative for Self-Empowerment

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 General Introduction

“A refugee life is a terrible life for a person who used to work and support his own, it’s a terrible life! When you come to the women and children in a refugee setting, they have problems. This is an abnormal situation and most of the women have lost their husbands as well as some children. Where there is no husband, no job or income, then it’s a serious problem. But this is a refugee life. I’m longing for the day that I’ll cease to be a refugee.” A Liberian Refugee in the Gomoa-Budumburam Refugee Camp in Ghana

Approximately 175 million persons, about 3% of the world’s population, currently reside outside the country of their birth. About 9% of these migrants are refugees (International Migration Report IMR 2002). According to the same report, at the end of 2000, the number of refugees in the world stood at 16 million, of which 12 million were under the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and 4 million, under the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Three million of these refugees were in developed countries with 13 million in developing countries. The largest number of refugees was found in Asia - 9million, and in Africa - 4million. UNHCR’s ‘numbers at a glance’ indicates that 21.7 million people or nearly one of every 275 people on earth are refugees, returned refugees, Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs), returned IDPs and others (UNHCR web site: “Numbers at a Glance”).

The above figures are as comprehensive as they get and rich in statistical data but as Singer, moderator for the UN IMR forum, puts it: “behind these numbers are people’s lives ... and consequences that come with migration, especially refugee movements, which may get lost when we look at them in aggregate (UN IMR 2003). Apparently, the implications of the refugee situation on the lives of the individuals affected, requires more than seeing them in numbers as expressed in the sentiments by the refugee quoted above.

The experiences of refugees in protracted situations, as is the case with Liberian refugees in Ghana, differ widely. Nevertheless, millions of refugees do continue to linger in camps, where they depend either on international aid or other coping mechanisms for their survival. Each protracted refugee situation is unique, requiring its own solution, based on the conditions in the countries of origin and asylum. Since many refugees in protracted situations come from countries that have been affected by conflict for many years, it is unlikely that large-scale

voluntary repatriation is a solution in the short run. For these refugees, local integration seems the most logical option, although it may not necessarily be available to them in the country where they currently reside (WESS 2004). In the light of these views, I wish to ascertain the present livelihood situation of the Liberian refugee women and children, the reasons informing their choice of one proposed solution over the other and the mechanisms they are employing to cope and plan for a future.

1.2 Refugees in Africa

A UNHCR 1999 mid-year count indicated that Africa had six million refugees (Owusu 2000). Implicitly, this seems to suggest a decrease in refugees on the continent. The records however indicate that since the 1970s, refugees have posed a growing problem in several African countries. As a result, Africa has obtained a rather dismal reputation as the “continent of refugees” (Skonhofs 1998).

According to Armstrong (1990), the continent is believed to have more displaced people because of political violence than any other region. Tribal, ethnic and political upheavals continue to characterise the continent and constitute an immediate cause of refugee flows. The remote causes, others argue, could be traced to the developed world. Hein (1993) traces this to decolonisation as in the case of Algerians in France. More recent reasons have been the proliferation of arms to fuel the flames of war after the end of the cold war in the West, foreign interest in diamond as in the case of the Belgians’ interest in Burundi, among others.

It is worth noting that in Africa, the traditional refugee-producing areas have been Sudan, Zaire, Ethiopia, parts of Southern Africa, Rwanda, Burundi and the Sahel regions. This is reflected in the availability of literature and research on African refugees in these areas. The same cannot be said about the refugee situation in West Africa.

1.2.1 Refugees in West Africa

Migration in the West African sub-region goes back a long way. Some scholars however deem it necessary to distinguish between migrants and refugees, asserting that attitudes and policies greatly differ depending on which category one falls within. Zucker and Zucker (1989) indicate that “refugees are neither immigrants nor illegal migrants, though like immigrants, they have forsaken their homelands for new countries and like illegal migrants, they may enter those new countries without permission. But the refugee is ... unlike either

because he/she is not drawn but driven: he seeks not to better his life but to rebuild it, to regain some part of what he has lost. The immigrant and migrant are thus propelled by hope; for the refugee, whatever hope there may be must arise from the ruins of tragedy.” Refugees are often not able to plan their movements, often leaving on the spur of the moment. They are said to be subject to push forces. Migrants on the other hand choose to leave, attracted by the host country to improve their economic well-being (Essuman-Johnson 1996).

Since the mid 1980s, West Africa has seen an exponential growth in refugee flows due to civil wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea- Bissau, political dissent in Togo (Owusu 2000) and more recently, in La Côte d’Ivoire. Other West African countries like Ghana, Nigeria, etc are necessarily involved as they have had to host refugees from the sub-region. The International Migration Statistics (2001) indicates that Ghana was hosting 13,000 refugees, asylum seekers and IDPs as at December 31, 2000. The report does admit that there is little standardisation among nations in the collection of data on immigrants, so this figure is debatable, but it does give a view of how matters were with respect to the categories above. These were said to be mainly from Liberia, Sierra Leone and Togo, thus necessitating the establishment of refugee camps in various locations within the sub-region.

1.2.2 Liberian Refugee Waves in Ghana

Ghana started receiving Liberian refugees from May 1990. These were Liberians who could afford their own passage. Upon arrival in Ghana, this earlier group settled on their own with Ghanaian friends and compatriots in the capital city, Accra.

As a show of concern for Ghanaians trapped by the conflict, the Ghanaian Government dispatched a ship to evacuate her nationals from Monrovia and Freetown. This however ended up bringing back both Ghanaians and Liberians who were stranded at the two ports. It was these and other evacuations that forced the government to set up a refugee camp for the first time in Ghana. Essuman specifically mentions that the first batch of Liberian refugees sent to the camp were from one of the Ghana Air Force flights to Freetown to evacuate stranded Ghanaians. Since then all non-Ghanaians who were evacuated from Liberia were sent to the camp. He asserts, “Starting with an initial group of 29¹ refugees in September 1990, it reached 8,000 in February 1991 and 13,000 in February” (Essuman-Johnson 1994:31). Even though the camp commandant is cited as the source of these figures, I think the figures should be

treated with caution, as its reliability cannot be ascertained. The first major wave of Liberian refugees in Ghana was thus evacuated between August and November 1990.

The second major wave of about 4,000 Liberian refugees came in mid-May 1996 on the Bulk Challenge-Lagos, following renewed fighting in Monrovia, the so-called “Easter Terror”. This voyage on May 5-14, 1996 made the headlines in the international media when a number of neighbouring countries, initially including Ghana, would not allow it to dock. It was claimed that half of the ship’s 4,000 passengers were trained Liberian rebels. A lack of fuel coupled with the poor condition of those on-board, obliged the Ghana government to allow disembarkation of the refugees. This necessitated the creation of a second refugee camp at Sanzule-Krisan near Takoradi in the Western region of Ghana (Owusu 2000, CNN 1996). Intermittent fighting in the following years occasioned movements to and from the camps to Liberia.

1.3 Definition of a Refugee

Even though migration, voluntary or forced, has existed for ages, it was not until after the Second World War that attention was given to this phenomenon. The typology “refugee” was established as an international concept in 1951. Thus the UN 1951 Convention, defined a refugee as any person who:

“owing to well-founded fear of persecution by reason of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country” (UN Convention 1951 Art.1 [2]).

This convention covered only people who became refugees as a result of events occurring before 1st January 1950. Besides, a “well-founded fear” is rather subjective, as it can easily not be defined especially “in situations where people flee to escape the ravages of war and where flagrant violations of human rights are part of everyday life” (Kibreab 1987:7). It was also very restrictive not only in time, but also in space because it did not take into account the regional variations in refugee issues. Even though it is accepted as the valid, “official definition”, its limitations have occasioned other additions.

To cater for these variations especially in Africa and Latin America² and to address the problems specific to African refugees who were not covered by the UN Convention, the

Organisation of Africa Unity (OAU) passed a regional supplementary convention in 1969. It tried to overcome the definitional restrictions of the UN Convention by extending the definition of a refugee to include:

“Every person who, owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing order in either part of or the whole of his country of origin or nationality is compelled to leave his place of habitual residence in order to seek refuge in another place outside his country of origin or nationality” (OAU Convention on Refugees 1969, Art.1 [2]).

This definition, at least, caters for the peculiar circumstances leading to the majority of refugee flows in Africa – external (to the ruling government) aggression...seriously disturbing order – such as the political, ethnic and tribal conflicts that results in massive displacements.

Prior to the arrival of the Liberian refugees, the Ghanaian government had no experience with hosting refugees in a camp. There were thus no government ministry or agency with the expertise to handle such a situation, neither were there any government policy guidelines for handling refugees. The unexpected way in which they arrived in Ghana created problems as to whether they should be classified as refugees or not. The OAU Convention however covered them in so far as civil war was raging in their country and they were compelled to go to the ports (where they were picked up together with the evacuated Ghanaians) to seek refuge. Since Ghana had ratified both the UN and OAU conventions on refugees, these provided the basis for her dealings with the Liberian refugees. This though was done in an ad hoc manner due to the lack of local legislation on them. For the first two years, it could formally not accord them refugee status and when it finally did, it would only recognise them as De facto refugees³ apparently for the same reason.

Essuman-Johnson (1994) however suggests that implicitly, the lack of recognition had something to do with Ghana’s involvement with the ECOWAS Military Observer Group (ECOMOG) and its unwillingness to give the impression that the Liberians were in for a long stay. This might still explain why the government has granted official refugee status to so few of the refugees till date. In my view however, I believe that political considerations, even though unavoidable, should not be the central force in dealing with refugee populations; especially where their stay has turned out to be protracted due to continued fighting as is the case in Liberia.

It was also unclear to various Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) whether they could be designated as refugees at all due to the peculiar circumstances of their arrival. The government was also slow in seeking international assistance for them at the onset. Thus said, the response of the government, various voluntary individuals/groups, institutions of civil society as well as other AID organisations has been positive and has even been said to have helped transform the camp into ‘habitable’, ‘thriving’ communities (Owusu 2000). In 1992, the government passed the refugee law providing for the establishment of the Refugee Board, spelling out the rights and duties of refugees among others.

1.4 Proposed Solutions for Refugees

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is the UN lead agency primarily responsible for refugee protection and assistance. In line with this responsibility, they have proposed three traditional solutions to refugees, otherwise known as Durable Solutions. They are aimed at helping refugees and displaced people to become self-sufficient, independent from aid and to enable forced migrants participate fully in the socio-economic life, either at a new place or their place of habitual residence where they might be internally displaced.

The three alternatives of durable solutions are Resettlement in a third country of asylum, Local Integration in the country of first asylum and Voluntary Repatriation to the country of origin, the latter being preferred as the most desirable and durable of the solutions.

Resettlement in a third country was very popular in the 1970’s due to willingness in the West to accept mostly “working refugees” like the Algerians in France, the Turks in Germany, etc. Most countries admitted these on annual quotas and the preferences seemed to be for refugees from certain areas, especially Eastern Europe, South Asia and limited numbers from North Africa (Melander 1982, Kibreab 1987). In recent years however, the general “fatigue” of these hosting nations has rendered this solution rather unpopular, but some countries like Canada, Australia, the USA, Norway, Sweden, and England still pursue it. Increasingly, an alternative solution being proposed is the “Neighbouring Area” concept. The idea here is that refugees be sent away from the West to be resettled in camps built in a country close to their habitual residence till such a time when the situation “home” is good enough for their return.

Local integration in the country of first asylum became progressively popular in the 1980's due to the massive movements of displaced persons that made it even more difficult for the West to want to help. It is proposed that this be done either by creating organised settlements or by letting the refugees settle spontaneously among the local population, as is the case with the Kagera Region in Tanzania (see Ugullumu 1999, Kibreab 1987). Refugees are increasingly recognised not as burdens, but as people with skills who can contribute in countless ways to the development of the communities in which they settle. Thus, their remaining in temporary settlements, continually dependent on international assistance, is considered an under-utilisation of their potential. This is to be avoided through local integration (Martin 1992).

Voluntary repatriation is apparently the most desired solution where refugees volunteer to return to their country of origin. Kibreab (1983; 1987) however suggest that it should occur only when the root causes of refugee flows are eliminated. He cited examples like the former Portuguese colonies of Guinea Bissau, Angola, Mozambique as well as Zaire and Zimbabwe where hundreds of thousands of refugees were voluntarily repatriated when favourable conditions were restored. He asserted that these large numbers of returnees in the past are evidence of African refugees' strong desire to return to their homeland when the cause of flight is eliminated. Disturbing questions arise here, though, as to whether the causes of conflict can ever be eliminated; who determines when it is safe to return; the degree of voluntariness required and the extent to which the refugee's personal experiences are to be taken into account in the case of repatriation. Besides, making one's life revolve around "waiting to return home" can be quite unsettling, making integration even more difficult. This is especially the case where conflicts are long-term, dragging on endlessly as is normally the case with conflicts in most parts of Africa and the world in general. Due to the limitations of the solutions above, recent discussions have been about Preventive Protection and Safe Havens, ideas of which the Neighbouring area concept is very much a part.

Preventive Protection envisages a long-term solution by proposing a shift in focus from refugees as a "problem", to addressing the causes of refugee flows so that people are not displaced in the first place. Whilst this sounds nice, it might be rather unrealistic in its aspirations due to the complex interplay of forces and power relations so inherent in many of the conflicts generating refugee flows, making these "causes" ones that cannot be wished away. Safe havens are proposed as an alternative to the former. It is the idea that "havens

should be created for the people in the place where they are”. This however implies keeping people close to the conflict, not to mention the subsequent threats this might pose to their very existence. The acute situation of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), which is fast becoming a crisis of global proportions, attests to the non-viability of this solution.

1.5 Problem Statement

The statute of the office of the UNHCR generally provides, among other things, that it assumes the function of providing international protection to refugees who fall within the scope of the present statute. It is also to seek permanent solutions for the problem of refugees by assisting governments concerned and private organisations to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of such refugees or their assimilation within new national states (Statute of the Office of the UNHCR 1996).

Apparently among the traditional durable solutions proposed, the emphasis seems to be first on voluntary repatriation and then on local integration. It is only in circumstances where some civilians cannot repatriate and are unable to live permanently in their country of first asylum that resettlement in a third country may be considered as the only feasible option (ibid.). The statistics (WESS 2004) indicate that voluntary repatriation on the African continent had exceeded new outflows by 2 million during 1994-1998, but the most recent five years show slightly more refugees becoming displaced than finding a durable solution. In spite of these facts, the policy direction is still very much geared towards this so-called solution as the subsequent discussion shows.

In line with this, UNHCR-Ghana initiated a voluntary repatriation exercise in the camp in 1997, at a time when the democratic election of Charles Taylor⁴ seemed to suggest an end of the war. This was in collaboration with the Ghanaian government⁵ which showed its support by giving an ultimatum that the refugees accept to return voluntarily or re-integrate into the Ghanaian society either as naturalised citizens or live as any other foreigner⁶. The refugees, it appeared, had little choice over the course of action in this instance. The reason given by the chairman of the GRB was that “nobody can live as a refugee forever”, adding that if they decided to stay in Ghana instead of taking advantage of the on-going repatriation exercise by the UNHCR, they could stay but not in the camp. Those unwilling to return home by the end of December 31, 1998 would then have to fulfil requirements of Ghanaian Immigration Laws

after which, they would have to make their own accommodation arrangements (Cooper 1998:1). Given the depressed economy of the country with its associated problems, re-integration does not seem so attractive even though it might be preferred to returning to a country still in conflict. In an interview with both the UNHCR and the Government, they admitted that this repatriation exercise was not well-planned and the proper groundwork was not done to ensure refugee safety. The records indicate that only few registered to go back and quite a number who went returned later while some lost their lives. The onset of yet another war in 2002 resulted, not only, in relaxing the above requirements but accepting more refugees in the camp.

Recently, since 2004, another repatriation exercise is ongoing but with a change in the policy language of the actors involved. The UNHCR is now 'counselling' people to take advantage of the voluntary repatriation exercise they have arranged to ensure safe return for spontaneous returnees and any others who want to return against all odds. This is so despite the admission that Liberia is still unsafe and that those returning do so at their own risk⁷. They are however quick to add that the refugees are not obliged to go and do so only because they strongly wish to. This though they have adequately been informed about the realities on the ground and the implications their decision to return could have on their well-being. The government also seems to concede that the refugees can neither be 'booted out' nor can the camp be dissolved.

1997 also marked UNHCR's decision to gradually withdraw assistance from the refugees. This was initiated by limiting material assistance to only the vulnerable until complete withdrawal in 2000. It was explained as part of what was said to be a 'regional decision'. The refugees were largely left on their own to cope until recently when UNHCR returned in 2002.

A highly publicised event on the camp was the establishment of a supposedly successful Neighbourhood Watch Team (NWT) in 2003, made up of gallant camp volunteers. This coupled with staff changes in the UNHCR, the new staff of which were said to have been very instrumental in the set-up of the NWT, is claimed to have considerably improved the security situation on the camp, especially that of women. (USCR WRS 2003).

In view of the above, the study generally seeks to ascertain the livelihood means of the refugees, especially women and children; their response to the proposed solutions; their perceptions about their personal security and the coping strategies they are employing as a

way forward. To elucidate a bit further, I wish to take into consideration the ‘uncertainty’ that must be occasioned by the so-called durable solutions; how it influences their life situations; the nuances in their perceptions regarding these solutions; their assessment of their future possibilities; the basic strategies they are employing to cope and how these are also influencing their life course. I have thus formulated these specific objectives of research:

- Explore the perceptions of the women and children about their refugee status and its impact on them.
- Find out their current concerns resulting from the proposed durable solutions of “Voluntary Return”, “Re-integration” and “Resettlement”.
- Examine the coping mechanisms employed by these to enable them deal with their situation.

The following questions have been identified as a means of researching the outlined objectives:

1. How has the refugee situation affected their life situation, especially that of women and children, in terms of education and personal security?
2. What reasons inform their choice to return, integrate in the host country or reach out for resettlement?
 - a. How do they evaluate their present situation?
 - b. How do they perceive the process of assimilation into the Ghanaian society?
 - c. What options, in their view, are available to them to enable them plan and carve out a future for themselves and their children?
3. What by way of institutional support, if any, is being offered to enable them develop their resource base so as to improve upon their lives currently and in the future?

1. 6 Presentation of Chapters

In *Chapter 2*, I briefly present the host country and give a background to the study area. I have, among other things, introduced some institutions involved in the lives of the refugees and operationalised my definition of children in this study.

The theoretical considerations of Space/Place and actor-oriented theories are considered in **Chapter 3**. Conceptualisations of “Agency” and “Home” help discuss ways in which refugees act as agents of change in coping with their protracted displacement as well as the reasons informing their choice of one durable solution over the other. To enable them express their views on these issues, **Chapter 4** presents reasons for the choice of qualitative methodology. It also considers the methods/techniques employed in data collection and its appropriateness to the objectives of this study. The ways in which the analysis was conducted and issues of “rigour” have also been discussed.

In presenting the results of the analysis, **Chapter 5** examines the ways in which the structures in place act to enable and/or constrain the refugees in their situation. This provides a contextual background to the subsequent discussions which are mainly based on the narratives of the refugees.

Chapter 6 explores ways in which the refugees have, through various livelihood means, coped with their protracted displacement. Their security concerns are highlighted as a factor influencing some measures they employ to cope. These are revealed to be at best, temporary in providing sustenance. Education has been identified as a long-term means of coping.

In Chapter 7, attention is thus given to the educational prospects available to the women and children, as well as the factors constraining access to various forms of it. The youth have also been given attention with respect to some challenges facing them.

Chapter 8 deals with the refugees’ perceptions on the three proposed solutions and the reasons informing their choice of one over the other. The reality of the situation as opposed to their expectations of a desired solution has been considered.

Finally, **Chapter 9** presents the conclusions and recommendations of the study.

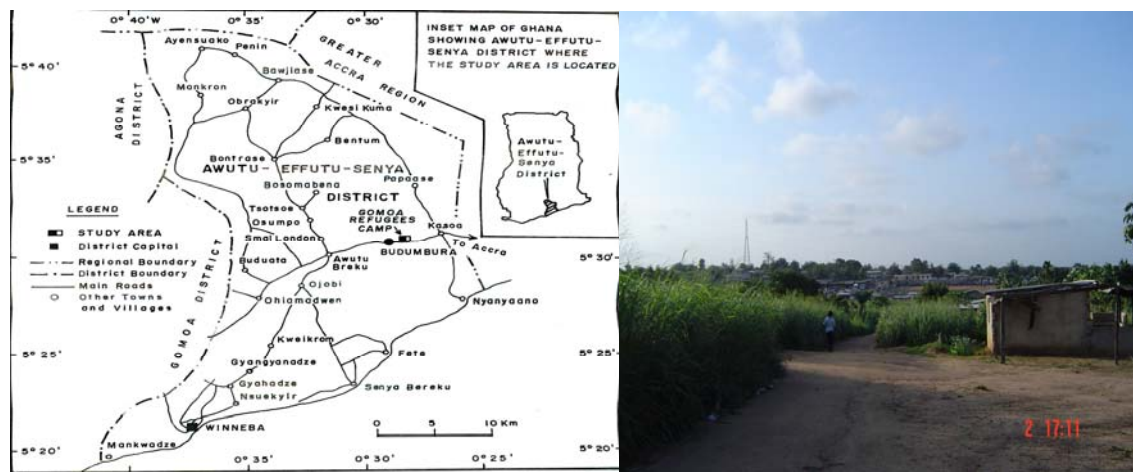
Chapter 2: Background Chapter

The Republic of Ghana is an African country which lies on the Gulf of Guinea, a few degrees north of the equator and is located in West Africa with an area of 239,460km². It is bordered on the North by Burkina Faso, on the East by Togo, on the West by La Côte d'Ivoire and in the South by the Atlantic Ocean. The climate is tropical and agriculture is the backbone of the economy, contributing about 45% to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 60% to employment (Ghanaweb homepage). Liberia is located further west of Ghana, before La Côte d'Ivoire and is thus not an immediate neighbour. It is however the closest anglophone country to the west and a neighbour with respect to the ECOWAS.

2.1 The Study Area

The Gomoa-Budumburam Refugee Camp is located in the Awutu-Effutu (Afutu)-Senya district of the Central region⁸. It is some 35km West of the capital city, Accra and about an hour's drive Northeast on the Accra-Winneba Trunk Road. It is the largest refugee camp hosting Ghana's highest concentration of Liberian refugees and one of the two most established the other being the Sanzule-Krisan camp near Takoradi in the Western Region (Klejnowski 1997).

Fig. 1 Locational Map Showing Study Area; Fig. 2 Overview of the Camp



Source: Survey Department of Ghana

Source: Researcher's own photograph

The camp was involuntarily established by the Ghanaian government to accommodate the first wave of unplanned refugees (30) who accompanied evacuated Ghanaians from the ports

of Monrovia and Freetown in October 1990. The original structures on the camp were built by Osofo (Pastor) Nana Akwam but were abandoned because the government had earlier seized the land from him. The government through the NMP decided to accommodate the Liberians here. Located adjacent to the Budumburam Village, the refugees have spilled into it over time and into surrounding areas in the Gomoa district.

The Camp is divided into zones, with zones 1-9 covering 141 acres of land within the camp, whilst zones 10-12 are located within the Budumburam village. Liberians constitute 70% of the population in the latter zones. Here, most cannot afford to buy land or prefer not to since their stay in Ghana is supposed to be temporary. Few have bought, though it is not clear if they are legally entitled to it or not. More commonly, they enter into lease agreements with village landowners for a period of about 3-5 years to rent already built houses or construct new ones. When the lease expires, there is a possibility to renew it, usually at a higher cost, move out or move into the camp. Whatever structures they have built on the land revert to the landowner upon their departure. Land conflicts have arisen periodically when Liberians attempt to build just outside the boundary of the camp without paying for the land. In some cases, newly constructed houses in these areas have been destroyed by Ghanaian landowners. Generally speaking, the refugees co-exist peacefully with their Ghanaian neighbours and intermarriages are relatively common⁹. It is however not rare for refugees to blame the Ghanaians for mishaps or other crimes and vice versa¹⁰.

Formerly, the camp was divided into Areas A-Z which were too fragmented and confusing administratively, thus the change to zones in 2001 during the administration of the previous camp manager. The cemetery built in area Z (zone 12) serves both communities. Technically, it is only residents in zones 10-12 who pay for accommodation, whilst most structures on the camp are said to be allocated for free to “needy ones” by the camp officials through the zonal heads.

In 2003, its name was changed from “Camp” to Budumburam Settlement because of improved infrastructure coupled with the fact that it has been in existence since 1990¹¹. “Settlement” however remains an official title as it is still most commonly referred to as *the Camp* (italicised emphasis mine), a title I have chosen to retain throughout this work.

2.2 Population

Recent estimates peg the Ghanaian population at 20.9million, 66% of which are rural, with a population growth of 2.6% (UN 2003). The last census conducted in 2000 however put it at 18,412,247. According to the World Refugee Survey 2003, Ghana hosted more than 40,000 refugees at the end of 2002, including some 35,000 from Liberia, about 5,000 from Sierra Leone, and nearly 1,000 from Togo. About 3,000 new asylum seekers entered the country during the year (USCRI). These figures have since changed with the influx of more refugees from these countries due to persistent war.

A UNHCR (Dec.2003) survey carried out in 2003 estimated a total refugee and asylum seeker population (including Sanzule, Accra, Budumburam and Bole) of 48,034, 49.9% of whom are women and 50.1%, men. The estimated refugee population on the Budumburam Camp was 41,853, the majority (41,720) of whom are Liberians. The rest are from La Côte d'Ivoire (25), Sierra Leone (49), Togo (50) and other nationalities (9). These figures are however fluid due to the constant in and out flows on the camp. It is chronicled that in the past twelve months, due to the situation in Liberia and La Côte d'Ivoire, 6,000 new arrivals settled in Budumburam (UNHCR-Ghana 2004).

2.2.1 Women and Children

Generally, women form the bulk (21,405) but specifically, Liberian women are in the majority (21,351), whilst the inverse is true of the other refugee populations (UNHCR-Ghana 2003). The actual numbers present in Ghana though are not available as some do not register upon arrival, whilst others live in various areas in Ghana other than the camps and reception centres under the purview of GRB and UNHCR.

According to the statistics, a breakdown by age and sex of the refugees and asylum seekers in the camp as at 2003, indicate that there are 1,988 male and 2,040 females between the ages of 0-4 years. Children between the ages of 5-17 years were 6,602 males and 7,479 females respectively. This brings the total number of children below 17 to 18,109 of which 8,590 are male and the remaining 9,519 are female¹². Of these, there are about 300 unaccompanied and separated children¹³. A survey conducted in 2003 indicated that there were more than 300 children under 17 years who were not in school. The exact figures are hard to come by due to various logistical problems associated with counting the actual numbers present in the camp at

any point in time. The figures provided however suggest that the youth constitute a sizeable chunk of the population with females in the majority.

2.2.2 Camp Children Defined

The operationalised definition of children in this study is youth, between the ages of 14 to 20, who came to the camp in 1990 as children or were born there and have grown up there. This is not to suggest that children below these ages are not important but I choose to focus on the youth as a vital link between adults and children and as ones who can meaningfully contribute to peace building in the camp. In considering these then, I wish to be able to explore their life situation and the opportunities available to them in their protracted situation, if any. The Camp Management toolkit (CMt 2004:240) notes: “youths and adolescents are at particular risk during displacement because of their dependence and vulnerability as unlike adults, they are still developing and therefore have different needs and priorities. They thus have specific needs for guidance and attention”. The distinction between children and adolescents is thus important, they argue, as the latter may face some of the same problems as children in terms of their development but have many aspects of life that differ much from that of children.

2.2.3 Youth on the Camp

The situation has it that many children have grown up and spent all their lives in the camp. Such youths represent a variety of adult experiences – adolescent mothers, orphans, students, dropouts, disabled and so on. In the course of the research, the subject of the youth came up on several occasions with almost all the respondents mostly expressing concern about this category with respect to the challenges they are facing in the camp. These views combined with a life history account of a youth and a focus group discussion with some youths, revealed several areas in which they are vulnerable and also the ways in which they are managing against the odds. Among the issues raised were that of poor access to education; a high school drop-out rate mainly due to financial constraints; the “child born child” concept¹⁴; the loss of parental control as a result of negative peer pressure; absence of parents either by loss through war or resettlement in search of better opportunities; reception of remittances and subsequent misuse of funds without proper supervision; dependence on abusive relationships and multiple partners; idleness due to unfounded expectation of resettlement; alcohol/drug abuse¹⁵; recalcitrant behaviour; frustrations with the system with the associated bleak future prospect; and being thrust into adult roles before readiness to assume these responsibilities; to mention a few¹⁶.

On a more positive note, some youths are involved in various sporting activities, peer counselling and other activities as a means of channelling their energy into productive endeavours. This reduces idleness, boredom and hopefully prevents them from being involved in disruptive, negative activities that could affect the fragile camp stability.

2.3.4 Vulnerable Groups

According to the UNHCR, these include unaccompanied/separated minors, chronically ill, the disabled, elderly ones, women at risk, single/widowed mothers with lots of children, teenage mothers, women with disabled children and all who are considered vulnerable in human rights parlance¹⁷. This criterion is generally accepted. A former leader of the LRWC says about his definition of the vulnerable: “UNHCR has a way of determining this and I agree with their definition because these people are vulnerable”. He however thought that pregnant women should be added. The social counsellor extended it to include street children. The Unaccompanied/separated children, most of whom are adolescent or youth are of particular concern. Shelter to house them is not available thus necessitating their being placed with foster parents if possible. Many, though, live on the streets and engage in negative practices. With respect to shelter for them, the UNHCR indicates that there are problems with land acquisition that remains to be resolved by the GRB. In the meantime, they prefer to place them with responsible foster parents who are supported to care for them. Many still express the dire need for shelter in the absence of which some refugee officials, struggling with their own problems, have had to take on extra mouths because these had nowhere else to go. The majority apparently end up on their own or on the streets and left to their own devices; often to the detriment of others.

The local Ghanaian population in Budumburam is made up of some 10,000 adults and approximately 25,000 children and adolescents (UNHCR-Ghana 2004). Apparently, the refuge population exceeds the locals, something which has socio-economic as well as cultural implications for both communities. Generally speaking, they co-exist peacefully, even though the realities are far more complex than can easily lend itself to explanations.

2.3 Administration of the Camp

The sectoral agency of the government responsible for Refugees in Ghana is the Ministry of Interior. The Ghana Refugee Board (GRB) serves as the government agency mandated to act on behalf of this ministry and the institution through which it performs its functions. The

GRB is a body established under Ghanaian Law to manage all issues relating to refugees in Ghana. Recognising the need for national legislation to guide dealings with refugees, PNDC Law 305 was passed on 27th August 1993, but the first board was established in 1995. It is a twelve-member body with one representative chosen by the UNHCR to sit as an observer (Fritz 2001). It has a Chairman appointed by the President and members from different sector ministries, making it an inter-ministerial body. It is the official government counterpart of UNHCR-Ghana charged with the responsibility of overseeing government policy on refugee issues including refugee status determination, assisting them to seek employment and seeing to their welfare¹⁸. The Board appoints a Settlement Manager on the Camp who represents it in all its activities there and reports directly to it. The National Disaster Management Organisation (NADMO) and the National Mobilisation Programme (NMP), government organisations responsible for disaster relief in Ghana, have administrative responsibility for the camp. They coordinate with the Board to provide human resource and other logistical support, as is the case with the Settlement manager who is an employee of NADMO¹⁹. The Board was dissolved in 2001 but was reconstituted in November 2002 and has been actively functioning since. The Ghana Police Service is the government agency providing security and is complemented by the Neighbourhood Watch Team (NWT), a voluntary-based refugee security outfit.

Between 1976 and 1990, the UNHCR office offered counselling services to the Government on the relatively few number of refugees, mostly from Southern Africa. Unable to single-handedly manage the influx of refugees in 1990 however, the Government called on it to help actively with material assistance and other issues, thus dramatically increasing its operations in Ghana (GRB in Dick 2002). From a Counselling Service provider, it became a Chargé de Missions and has, since 2002, been upgraded to a Regional hub. It offers assistance to the refugees in collaboration with four local implementing partners (The Christian Council of Ghana, the Ghana Red Cross Society, the National Catholic Secretariat and Assemblies of God Development and Relief Services) and UN sister agencies such as UNICEF, UNDP, WFP and the Ghana Government.

Prior to 2002, it offered general material assistance but from 1997, all forms of this were phased out gradually and ceased finally in 2000, when UNHCR withdrew its operations from the camp. Since June 2002 however, it has resumed in response to the new influx of refugees but this time, offering community-based assistance in the areas of health, education and

sanitation. It collaborates with the government through the GRB supposedly in the common interest of the refugees (UNHCR-Ghana 2003). The refugees generally consider it as their "father", but the ways in which this role is played out, can be and is the subject of much debate within refugee studies with respect to the humanitarian aid regime and the usefulness of camps in addressing refugee issues (see Harrell-Bond 1998, Goodwin-Gill 1996).

To ensure the efficient running of the camp, the camp community has an internal democracy run by the Liberian Refugee Welfare Council (LRWC). It comprises of an appointed seven-member executive committee consisting of a Chairman, two Co-Chairpersons for Administration and Operations respectively and four executives all working on a voluntary basis. The latter is further sub-divided into eight committees overseeing the areas of education, women and children's affairs, health and sanitation, arbitration, finance, logistics and mobilisation, public affairs and information, as well as Sports and entertainment. This is an all-Liberian body separate from, but answerable to the Camp Management (Government Representative). The chairman is the overhead boss to whom they all report, while the co-chair administration is responsible for the day to day operation of the camp and the co-chair operations is responsible for the zones which are headed by zonal heads²⁰. The council has alternatively been describes as the "local government" body of the refugees and an exercise in "self-governance". Among its responsibilities is the monitoring of camp activities, dispute settlements, appealing externally for funding and liaising between the camp community and the Ghana government, to mention a few (Zongolowicz 2003, UNHCR-Ghana 2003).

Apparently, the refugees also show great initiative in organising themselves to meet various needs as indicated by the number of NGOs and Community or Camp-Based Organisations (CBOs) present in the camp. According to Mr. Best, the Assistant Co-ordinator of NGOs under the LRWC, there are about 37 NGOs helping the Liberians in various areas. He indicates that all the local NGOs are headed by Liberians themselves. There are also about 15 CBOs headed by both Liberian Men and/or Women but working on Women's issues.

2.4 Socio-Economic and Cultural Relations between Refugees and Local Community

The Ghanaian and Liberian cultures are very different, with the latter being a lot more open than the former. This can and has been a potential source of clashes between host and refugee,

though not always the case. To minimise the friction, the government together with the UNHCR has been working to ensure that the community generally benefits from some services provided to the refugees. Thus the local community can access the clinic, whilst the schools are used by both parties as well as the public toilets especially in the village. In the latter however, the extent of service provided with respect to that on the camp is pretty limited. For instance, the sanitation situation on the camp, whilst not ideal, is much better than that in the village as the garbage collection service has not been extended there.

On the other hand, the economy is said to be “blooming” with both parties benefiting greatly²¹, although this must be considered within the context of the limited activities that were present in the area before the arrival of the refugees. About 70% of the market population are Liberians, with both markets located on the camp in zones 3 and 10 but easily accessible to the locals. The same is true of the many businesses and other services that have sprung up all over the camp. There are also various support farms around the camp producing Liberian food such as the various greens²², etc that the locals have been introduced to. Apparently, there are a lot of activities in the area due to the presence of the refugees. This has given rise to a school of thought that if the Liberians leave, the locals will be at a loss as the former have added a lot of culture to the place and have even put the name Gomoa-Budumburam on the map of the world. Due to the international nature of refugee issues, their presence has also attracted a lot of visitors, both positive and otherwise, to the area, something which impacts on the local population as well and opens up their society than would usually be the case with a typical rural setting in Ghana.

2.5 Summary of Background Chapter

In this chapter, I have briefly presented the host country and given a background to the study area. I have outlined the population composition which indicates that women and children are in the majority. I have operationalised the definition of children and mentioned a few challenges faced by this group. I also introduced some organisations responsible for the refugees as well as others offering various services. I conclude by highlighting the socio-economic and cultural relations between the refugees and the local community. I will now consider the theoretical grounding for the study in the proceeding chapter.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Considerations

In this chapter, I will briefly outline the place of refugee studies in geography and give attention to the theoretical basis of the study.

3.1 The Place of Refugee Studies in Geography

Human migration is a universal phenomenon with a history as old as humankind and with causes as many as they are varied (Shanmugaratnam et al 2003:8). Although migration has long been an important topic of research within the discipline of geography, refugee studies and forced migration have not had a strong position here (Brun 2003).

The scope of the refugee problem is immense, and subsequently, the fields of research have been extensive. Academics and scholars have written about it for years and from different perspectives but it was only in the 1970's and particularly in the 1980's that the label "Refugee Studies" emerged in response to a call for the systematisation of the study of refugees (Skonhoft 1998:1). According to Malkki (1992), this label has likewise emerged more recently in geography. Reviewing the areas of research to which geography has contributed, Black (1991, 1993) and Robinson (1993) indicate that geography, as a discipline of synthesis, has much potential to offer explanations in various areas of refugee issues.

Indeed in geography, research on refugees in the third world has to a great extent focused on the causes of refugee migration as well as consequences of refugee movement and uneven development (Black 1991, 1993). Black (1993:7-9) advocates for the need to focus on the broader process of refugee migration arguing that "it cannot be seen as an isolated event, either for the individual migrant, or in a more general sense, but as part of a wider process". Robinson (1993:3 in Brun 2003) also states: "geographers have a passion for place, as well as space, a concern which can throw more light on topics such as why some individuals become refugees, whilst others do not, why some refugees eventually return, whilst others do not, and why refugees 'choose' the resettlement destination which they do". Black (1993) further points out that an understanding of the socio-economic and political processes under specific conditions of refugee migration is of theoretical interest to geographers. Apparently, drawing on different theories from various sub-disciplines within geography can be rewarding in dealing with the complex issues involving refugee issues, especially as these have shown themselves to cover such a broad scope of areas.

3.2 Theoretical Perspectives in Geography

This study is grounded within humanistic geography and the theoretical considerations are eclectic, building upon different theories from various sub-disciplines within human geography, such as space/place concepts and actor-oriented theories. These, I hope, will serve as “a means of understanding people’s (refugees’) *‘elusive sense of place’*” (Limb and Dwyer 2001:3, italics mine).

Place is regarded as having both an objective characteristic of location a subjective experience of the individual. In both senses, it suits my interest in refugees in terms of their camp life, the solutions at their disposal and their perceptions on these issues. Action-oriented theories are also useful because they emphasise, not the helplessness of refugees but, their resourcefulness and the possibility for them to make it under enabling circumstances. I briefly draw on feminist geographies, not as a concept in itself, but because of its methodological relevance and conceptual usefulness in addressing the issue of gendered relations; thus enabling me to explain my choice of women and children as the focus of research, rather than refugees in general.

3.3 The Concept of Space and Place

Space and place are complicated and contested concepts in geography related to different traditions and worldviews (Brun 2003). She (ibid.) understands space and place as closely connected and thus sees no fundamental differences in theorising about them. Quoting Simonsen (1993), she indicates that social spatiality - that spatial forms are an integrated part of social practices and that such practices are all situated in space- is the foundation of both concepts. Without engaging in the long drawn debate about the relationship between space and place in geography, I wish to draw on these with respect to their contribution in understanding refugee experience especially as they very much influence research and policy implementation. Geographical understandings of space and place as applied to refugee issues can on the one hand be essentialist and on the other, constructionist.

The essentialist notion of space and place suggests that all people have a natural place in the world, thus forced migrants are regarded as being ‘torn away’ from their places, thus losing their culture and identity. This is resonant with a perspective that is central to human geography, as indicated by Tuan’s (1980:6) assertion, “it is a current and popular belief that

people do not know who they really are unless they can trace their roots”. The implication here is that people’s identities are closely interlinked with their being rooted in a place, thus making forced migrants an ‘uprooted’ lot with lost identities and cultures. It is this very conception that confers refugee status, as one would have to cross an international border and, in essence, ‘be uprooted’, to be recognised as one. An extension of this notion is what Sørensen (1996 in Brun 2003) terms the “mental health perspective” in refugee studies. Here, displacement and separation from one’s country, especially through force, is seen as leaving the displaced person in a precarious ‘uprooted’ state marked by confusion and abandonment. This is seen as resulting in exceptional behavioural changes that are usually negative (Harrell-Bond 1986). This view constitutes displacement as a psycho-pathological problem with moral underpinnings (Brun 2003).

Even though moral considerations should not be important in refugee studies, the perception that refugees represent a ‘problem category’ is unfortunately very central both in research and some host population’s dealings with them as is the case in Ghana. Differences in culture among Liberians and Ghanaians, with the former being more open, are often misconstrued as deviant, immoral behaviour by the host. This promotes the largely negative view that their displacement must be largely contributing to their behaviour and has been a major bone of contention and source of conflict between the two parties.

Whilst the trauma associated with forced displacement should not be underestimated and displaced people may be in need of assistance because of psychological problems due to the effects of displacement, it is in my view, a poor criteria for explaining the ways in which refugees behave. Their behaviour, I will argue, has more underpinnings than the mere fact of being displaced or “uprooted”. Whilst deviant behaviour among refugees is not to be excused, an essentialist notion of place can have a potentially damaging effect on dealings with refugees as an essentially problematic group and not as innovative agents fully aware of, and responsible for their actions and the consequences thereof.

As Massey (1994b) indicates, places become fixed locations with unique and unchanging characters when people and cultures are understood as localised and belonging to particular places. Contesting the latter view, Malkki (1997a: 72) asserts, “to plot only ‘places of birth’ and degree of naturalness is to blind oneself to the multiplicity of attachments that people form to places through living in, remembering and imagining them”. Here, space is

constructed out of the multiplicity of social relations across all social scales. Place is then an articulation of those relations, a particular moment in those networks of social relations and understandings (Massey 1994 a, b.). These views that emerged during the 1990's, challenge the essentialist perspective and seeks to denaturalise the relations between people, places and culture, not as a static, 'rooted' given, but as one that is in constant transformation - an understanding that is otherwise referred to as "reterritorialisation" (Gupta and Ferguson 1997b, Brun 2003).

3.3.1 Refugees' "Sense of place" and "At Homeness"

Shurmer-Smith and Hannam (1994) define space as a cultural or human construct thus according importance to meanings and perceptions of individuals. Space thus becomes something that is created intersubjectively between humans and not an object reality.

Drawing on Aristotle's definition of place as a portion of geographical space occupied by a person or thing, place here could refer to the camp as a physical space occupied by the refugees which restricts them to an exact part of space, but that is as far as this definition goes. This is especially the case as the usefulness or not of placing refugees in camps rages on in academic circles (see Black 1998 a, b; Crisp and Jacobsen 1998)

My use of place though is place as "the location of experience, the container of shapes, powers, feelings and meanings" (Walter 1988). This has got to do with "identity of place" consisting of realms of meaning, nature and social relations (Sack 1992). A "sense of place" will then be the individual's awareness of such an identity.

As Relph (1996) points out, both the type and intensity of "sense of place" depend on such things as familiarity, detachment, social status, gender and self-consciousness. Familiarity depends very much on whether one is an "insider" or "outsider".²³ For instance, most Liberians in the camp are very closed, linguistically, to the Ghanaian languages yet, the requirements of integration or naturalisation demand that one speak at least one Ghanaian language among other things.

Terms such as 'identity', 'rootedness', 'symbol of self' and 'at homeness' have all been used to describe the sense of belonging to a place. This brings us to the important concept of

'home'. Though largely existentialist in its claims, it is useful in understanding the extent to which it influences policy implementation with respect to refugee solutions.

Home has been defined as a place of security and comfort, a place in which an individual develops a conception of self (Walmsley and Lewis 1993). Some important questions arise with respect to the refugee woman and child who are not only subject to gendered relations but are marginalized in other ways. In the light of the durable solutions, the role of place and/or home is indeed hard to define for the refugee who might have to spend a considerable part of life in 'waiting'.

Teather's reflections on the concept of "place" and "home" are interesting in this regard. Relating her experiences as an expatriate immigrant in Australia, she talks about "becoming an outsider in an area". Quoting Pocock (1981:339), she asserts: "place, then, contains our roots, our unique point of reference. We may not be able to begin again but it is a point to which we can return, whilst 'home' is the point of stability during the changes and chances of this fleeting world". She further claims, "The process of making a new country one's own seems partly one of willpower, a determination to engage, and partly develops of its own accord. To make a new home, one has to relinquish the old" (Teather 1989:405/6). Porteous (1985:119) adds: "Home is where one is an 'insider'". I have dwelt on these views because, even though they present a sort of ideal, rather nostalgic sense of place and home to which most immigrants probably aspire, the extent to which the refugee fits into this mode is a question not easily answered.

The idea of "relinquishing the old" seems consonant with Mallki's (1997a) critique of refugee studies for having taken for granted that people and cultures are rooted in certain places, and implying that displacement is synonymous with being uprooted, uncultured. Indeed the experience of displacement is often portrayed very negatively with scholars stressing the 'uprootedness' of refugees because they have been removed from their cultures and land of origin. Recent research on refugees however indicates that the experience of displacement can also result in the remaking of self and seems to agree with the possibility of "making a new home". It also reveals itself contrary to the general conclusion that "normal life" can only be restored when a displaced persons return to their root or place of origin. This latter perception however fits well with the current international refugee policy that favours repatriation of refugees and asylum seekers as the best durable solution (Shanmugaratnam et al 2003).

Confronted daily with the “threat” of return or reintegration, can the refugees, though in protracted displacement, consider the camp or Ghana as a place of stability, a point of reference and ever be “insiders”? Considering Torres (1999) assertion that the struggle for recovery occupies a central place in the lives of refugees, the use of willpower in the process of making a new country one’s own does not seem far-fetched. Faced however with the uncertainty of ever settling how profound is the determination on the part of refugees to engage and to what extent is this of their own accord?

Apparently, the concept of place and home, while relevant, can prove rather problematic in the case of refugees as the uncertainties occasioned by the so-called preferred durable solutions influence to a large extent, the perceptions, life-situation and the way they might assess their future possibilities. Apparently, a more constructionist or pragmatic view is one that promotes the understanding that even though people have to flee, they are not torn loose from their culture, do not lose their identity and do not become powerless (Brun 2003). The idea that refugees are not powerless but are endowed with agency will now be explored.

3.4 Actor-Oriented Theory

According to Long and Long (1992), actor-oriented approaches require a full analysis of the ways in which different social actors manage and interpret new elements in their life-worlds. It implies an understanding of the organising, strategic and interpretative elements involved, and a deconstruction of conventional notions of planned interventions.

Introducing the concept of social actors, they argue that underpinning (either explicitly or implicitly) this interest in “social actors” is the conviction that, although it may be true that certain important structural changes result from the impact of outside forces, it is theoretically unsatisfactory to base one’s analysis on the concept of external determination. All forms of external intervention necessarily enter the existing life-worlds of the individual and social groups affected, and in this way are mediated and transformed by these structures. This point is illustrated by the well-documented withdrawal of UNHCR-Ghana’s support (due to structural changes) from the camp in 2000 and their subsequently conceding that most of the refugees seemed to be making it on their own without their presence. They (ibid.) thus assert that there is a need for a more dynamic approach to understanding social change which stresses the interplay of mutual determination of “internal” and “external” factors and

relationships. This requires taking into account, the central role played by human actor and consciousness.

Elaborating further on the concept of social actors, they (Long and Long 1992) indicate that these should simply not be seen as disembodied social categories (based on class or some other classificatory concept) or passive recipients of intervention. They should rather be seen as active participants who process information and strategies in their dealings with various local actors as well as with outside institutions and personnel. The precise paths of change and their significance cannot be imposed from the outside. Neither can they be explained in terms of the making out of some inexorable structural logic. Thus the different patterns of social organisation that emerge results from the interactions, negotiations and social struggles that take place between the several kinds of actors of which human agency is an integral part.

3.4.1 The Concept of Agency

This concept lies at the heart of any revitalised social actor paradigm and forms the pivot around which discussions aimed at reconciling notions of ‘structure’ and ‘actor’ revolve (Long and Long 1992). Notions of agency are constructed differently in different cultures (ibid.).

Drawing on Giddens’s structuration theory, several important concepts in discussing the role of refugees as active agents or actors come to the fore. He introduces the concept of “human agency which refers to people’s capabilities and their related activities or behaviour”, but not to the agents themselves (Giddens 1984). Whilst structural theories present agents as being ruled by structures, Giddens’s theory underscores the fact that structures are very much influenced, that is, created and re-created by people’s capabilities and behaviour. It thus recognises that agents are not merely puppets, swept along by circumstances and structures in place, but conscious and unconscious interpreters who transform the empirical world. So while social structures may entrap individuals or agents, constraining them, they also enable them as these agents reproduce social rules (Holt-Jensen 2003).

Generally, the notion of agency attributes to the individual actor, the capacity to process social experiences and to devise ways of coping with life, even under the most difficult forms of coercion. This is what is otherwise referred to as coping strategies (Skonhoft 1998). Within the limits of information, uncertainty and other constraints that exist, “social actors” are

“knowledgeable” and “capable” (Long and Long 1992). They are so even within severely restricted social space, of formulating decisions, acting upon them and innovating or experimenting. Moreover, it is also a necessary feature of action that, at any point in time, the agent “would have acted otherwise”: either positively in terms of attempted intervention in the process of “events in the world” or negatively in terms of forbearance. They thus attempt to solve problems, learn how to intervene in the flow of social events around them and monitor continuously their own actions, observing how others react to their behaviour and taking note of the various contingent circumstances (Giddens 1979, 1984). Long and Long (1992) add a note of caution however that, we should be careful to restrict our use of the term “social actor” only to those social entities that can meaningfully be attributed with the power of agency. In the case of this study, the refugees fit our idea of social actors especially in the light of how they are coping with their displacement situation.

A lot of literature (see e.g. Unwin 1991, Harvey 1973), emphasising the role of structure, often paint the picture of people being forced into a state of resignation, thus being driven by events and/or forces completely beyond their control. The role of agency in different and overlapping forms of migration then is worth considering as a conceptual base that captures the wider processes and social settings within which (in) voluntary migrations are situated (Shanmugaratnam et al 2003). Werlen’s (1993) Action theory is worth mentioning here as it urges geographers to focus attention on “actions and processes in space and how these are related to the agent’s understanding of the subjective, social and physical worlds.

Vincent and Refslund (2001) assert, “contrary to the common assumption about refugees, they are not all poor, resourceless persons who think only of surviving their present, difficult circumstances. Some of them have many skills, plan and work for a better future”. A lot of the literature on the camp seems to support this position. Describing the camp as a “habitable and thriving community”, Owusu (2000) asserts, “the greatest credit goes to the refugees themselves, especially the women who are determined against all odds to work hard to make a decent home away from home for themselves and their children.” The camp has elsewhere been supposedly described as “the Ritz of camps in West Africa and a success story” (Hartill 2003). Whilst this might not be a bit on the exaggerated side, it does give an indication, not of complete resignation, but of resourcefulness at play among most refugees.

Apparently, and as Shanmugaratnam et al (2003:11) point out, “displaced persons can be considered both as victims and agents of change”. Without underestimating the devastating impact of violence, war and flight on the actions and self-perception of refugees, agency and creativity, rather than passivity and resignation, would more accurately capture the way in which refugees often narrate their experience of displacement. So, in spite of the desire to spoon-feed these as helpless, hapless victims, refugees often reveal an extraordinary ability to face new situations and to take advantage of opportunities, if only they are offered the possibility of doing so (ibid.). As every individual does, I believe they are not automatic losers but do have resources which, given the right assistance, could be developed. This has amply been demonstrated in the case of the Liberian refugees who for two years of UNHCR’s complete withdrawal, had to survive on their own and did just that.

3.5 Feminist Geography

Without emphasising too much on feminist-specific theories, I draw on feminist geography because it addresses the issue of gendered relations and gender identity, issues that are rather important in dealing with any social group.

As humans, refugee women and men do not live completely independent of each other. In every aspect of life, gender or social constructions, with regards to who and/or what a woman or man should be, persists. Gender identity then is relational and something that can be created through dialogue, enabling one to know what is possible or not to do.

Power is often considered patriarchal or dominating but gender relations can also and more constructively so, look at how power is produced in situations. It is worth mentioning here then, the reason why my emphasis is on women and children even though the refugee experience is universal. Martin (1992) indicates that of the more than 20 million people who are refugees, 80% are women and children, many of whom live in women-headed households Moser (1993) also adds, “it is estimated that in refugee camps in areas of Africa and Central America, women head about 80-90 percent of the households”. These trends continue to the present as indicated by the records on Liberian refugee women and children as against men²⁴. Coupled with the fact that several studies identify this group as the most vulnerable in everyday life, this situation of displacement must present special added challenges, thus the decision to make them the object of research. This does not in any way underestimate the

seriousness of displacement and its impact on “man” as a whole. In order to change the widely accepted marginalized position of women, I would argue that men need to be changed. There is thus the need to involve men, not for their own sakes, but for the sake of the women whose gendered positions can only be turned around in full concert with men.

My main interest though is feminist geography’s contribution to methodology. It recognises that women all over the world are not the same and thus the need to conceptualise differences. Similarly, refugee experiences are not all the same, as each person’s experience and knowledge is situated, thus the need for methodology that is subjective to sensitivities and the individual voice.

3.6 Analytical Framework

This thesis explores the life situation of Liberian refugees in their protracted displacement and the reasons informing their choice of one solution over the other. It is eclectic in the use of theories and concepts to help conceptualise and analyse the findings of this research. An approach based on age and gender is adopted. This highlights the narratives of women, old and young, to reflect the reality of their not only being in the majority, but marginalised in various ways.

3.6.1 Place

As already indicated, space and place are core complementary concepts in geography. We have also established that geographical understandings of space/place as applied to refugee issues can on the one hand be essentialist and on the other, constructionist. Place in its essentialist application purports that life can only be complete when one returns home to their country of origin. Constructively, place is seen to be socially constructed through interaction. Rather than a “rooted” home, it presents an alternative and more dynamic view about “home”. In this thesis, place is examined in the light of the proposed durable solutions of return “home”, integration and resettlement. This is intended to illuminate the realities vis-à-vis the perceptions and/or desires of the refugees as to the options available. Given the protractedness of their displacement, a constructionist view is anticipated to reflect, more accurately, the reasons informing Liberian refugees’ choice of one solution over the other. But considering the policy preference for return or integration, it is necessary to keep an essentialist view in mind as a means of analysing the reality or the actual solutions implemented.

3.6.2 Agency

An actor-oriented approach drawing on Giddens's (1979) structuration theory advocates the duality of the relationship between agents and structures. The latter are thus seen to both enable and constrain human agency. In this study, structures have been restricted to some institutions involved in the lives of the refugees. To explore the ways in which these act to enable and/or constrain the refugees, their activities and services are examined. This is to provide a context for understanding how they affect the lives of the refugees. The main emphasis however is the ways in which the refugees mediate these structures in dealing with their situation. As indicated, the concept of agency assigns to individual actors the capacity to process experience and devise ways of coping with life, even under difficult circumstances. It is thus highlighted as a useful tool in analysing the role of the refugees as capable and knowledgeable "agents of change". This will be studied at two levels: the short and long term mechanisms they employ as a means of coping. Examining various livelihood strategies and their security concerns serve to clarify the positive and/or negative means of coping in the short term. Education in all its forms is considered vital in enabling one to cope in a sustained way. Education will thus be explored as to the educational prospects available to them as a long-term coping mechanism. All these will hopefully illuminate the ways in which the Liberian refugees resourcefully act to create and re-recreate the rules constraining them in their protracted displacement.

The complex and interrelated variables that are relevant in understanding the life situation of the refugees do not lend themselves well to representation in this simplified framework. Some will be fully developed within the narrative text. Recognising refugees as knowledgeable social actors require that their voices be heard on issues concerning them. In the following chapter, I will present the methodology that might help achieve this.

Chapter 4: Research Process and Methodology

4.1 How it all Started

My journeys to various countries heightened my sense of what it meant “to be away from home”. My curiosity about refugees in particular, however, was awakened when I met a friend of my sister’s family in La Côte d’Ivoire; he was a refugee from Rwanda. The story of his life before the war as compared to the life he was obliged to lead in flight now - far away from his wife and children - brought questions to my mind that I could neither easily answer nor was confident enough to ask him at the time. Unrelentingly, questions formed that needed researching into, invariably, a research interest had been born! My motivation to hear and give a voice to refugees was further boosted when this man was displaced yet a second time by the very thing that had occasioned his flight in the first instance – war – but this time in his country of refuge! This necessitated his flight to our home in Ghana. This time, I got to know a bit more of his story which, like that of millions of others like him, needs to be told and heard in a way that speaks to human dignity.

Around this time and just before coming to NTNU, the conviction that this was a research path worth exploring came when I had the opportunity to visit some friends who had gone on a witnessing assignment to the Gomoa-Budumburam Refugee Camp. The day spent with them visiting various Liberian refugees provided much insight. I then came to NTNU determined to pursue refugee studies. It was thus a welcome surprise to learn that the Department of geography, NTNU, to which I was admitted, was very much involved in Forced Migration/Displacement Studies. This of course would just mark the beginning of my journey into the lives of displaced persons – one that will hopefully result in my writing documents that speak to their sufferings, hopes dreams, lives gained and lives lost (Denzin 1989).

4.2 Choice of Methodology

To some extent, geography as a discipline has always spanned a wide range of methodological approaches and there are many different schools of thoughts as to how geographical research should be conducted. The preference might be for quantitative or qualitative methods respectively depending on whether one identifies with the positivist tradition or the humanistic one. Seeing that both methodologies have their strengths and

weaknesses, I would argue for a triangulation of methods as an effective way of getting the best out of any research endeavour. My choice of one method over the other is no attempt at dismissing its (quantitative) usefulness. Indeed in my previous study (see Tete 2001), I widely employed quantitative methods, as these were relevant to the stated objectives of my research. I thus agree that choosing a research method should be a case of picking the most appropriate relative to the knowledge one seeks. Here, the questions to be answered must guide the selection of methods (see Mikkelsen 1995; Limb and Dwyer 2001; Silverman 2001; Kitchin and Tate 2000).

4.3 Qualitative Methods

“Qualitative methodologies explore feelings, understandings and knowledges of others through various means. They also explore some of the complexities of everyday life in order to gain a deeper insight into the processes shaping our social worlds. It is also a means of understanding people, enabling us to engage in-depth with the lives and experiences of others”. Limb and Dwyer (2001:1, 3)

McCracken (1988:10) interestingly claims: “qualitative methods may have the power to take the investigator into the minds and lives of respondents, to capture them warts and all”. In this study, I am seeking an understanding of refugees and their perceptions on issues pertaining to their lives as displaced people. In view of this, and for all the reasons outlined above, I believe qualitative methods are best suited to my present research as I sought an in-depth, intensive and inter-subjective approach rather than an extensive, numerical or dispassionate one (Limb and Dwyer 2001).

To achieve this, I used illustrative sampling. Combined with a snowball sampling procedure, it guided my choice of informants as it became clearer who to ask what. It thus enabled me to draw on my understanding of the issues at stake to be able to decide which angle or perspective I needed to explore whilst in the field (Valentine 2001)²⁵. The qualitative research process has variously been described as iterative, emergent, simultaneous and flexible. Repstad (1993 in Skonhøft 1998) indicates that a feature that characterises much of qualitative research is the flexibility of the methods. He argues that whereas it is a methodological sin to change a quantitative questionnaire, unless the whole selection has been questioned, a researcher conducting qualitative interview will not see this as problematic. This flexibility guided not only my choice of respondents, but the appropriate methods to use as the research unfolded. In the process, I reformulated my research problem and readjusted my objectives to

reflect the realities in the field. There has also been a real “dance” between my objectives, theory, methodology and analysis; a correspondence that has provided refreshing ways of dealing with the issues under consideration (see Limb and Dwyer 2001; Creswell 2003).

Depending on one’s perspective and purpose, there is a multitude of ways in which to undertake qualitative research. Kitchin and Tate (2000) classify qualitative techniques into two generic classes: Interviewing and observation. For the purpose of this study, I employed Personal Narratives as the main method of enquiry. This was supplemented with participant observation, a focus group discussion, in-depth interviews of key informants and photographs. My secondary data sources included, but were not limited to, the existing state-of-the art literature on displacement.

4.3.1 Personal Narratives or Life History

“The life history has a potential to allow alternative voices to be heard. They may also help the researcher achieve a degree of depth, flexibility, richness and vitality often lacking in conventional questionnaire-based interviews. They may also help uncover not only what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, what they now think they did. They can illuminate both the logic of individual courses of action and the effects of systematic and structural constraints within which life-courses evolve”. Miles and Crush (1993)²⁶

The above statements are representative of the reason why I choose to employ the personal narrative or life history account as my main method of enquiry. In seeking answers to my research objectives and questions, I have tried to give a voice to the refugees, thus enabling them share their own experiences and tell as much of their own stories as possible. This I have endeavoured to do by using as much of their own narratives as space would allow, as the basis for analysis. Without essentialising their voices as if it was all that mattered (see Ager 1999), doing this will, at least, help to throw some light on their problems and solutions as they perceive it. This will hopefully help to tell and re-write their stories “from below” (Miles and Crush 1993).

Eyles and Perri (1993:107) define a life history study as one that “emphasises the experiences and requirements of the individual, that is, how a person copes with society, rather than how society copes with the stream of individuals”. It is also described as a way of capturing an individual’s or group’s life course, or specific aspects and turning points in individuals’ lives, to grasp “the life from within” (see Denzin 1989; Simonsen 1993; Skonhøft 1998). Löfgren

(1996) indicates that this method is useful when one is interested in studying changes over time. Seeking narratives of refugees on issues as indicated by my research objectives and questions necessitated questioning them on aspects that reflected much of their life course. Foregoing the banalities or day to day routines of their lives, I tried to understand their individual experiences as refugees, their response to reintegration/return policies and how they are coping with a changing world like theirs. Using the life history method, I believe, enabled me arrive at a richer detail of their accounts, which I would otherwise not have been able to obtain.

Their experiences, which Denzin (1989:33) refers to as “the individual meeting, confronting, passing through making sense of events in their lives”, can be both positive and negative. The negative or problematic ones which he refers to as “epiphanies or moments of revelation in an individual’s life (ibid.), are often moments of crisis and experiences that leaves a mark on people’s lives (Skonhofs 1998). She (ibid.) further asserts that these can change the fundamental meaning of structures in a person’s life, either positively or negatively. Focusing on refugee narratives through their life history accounts enabled me to address these epiphanies. Though different for each respondent, it generally involved their experiences during the war. This eventually occasioned their flight and its aftermath. In spite of the years that had passed, the memories were so vivid that most of the women cried whilst relating them²⁷. These are relevant as they greatly influence their choice of solution. Other epiphanies had to do with their life situation in the camp and especially their frustrations with the limited possibility of being resettled in a third country. These of course had implications for their present, future lives as well as the coping mechanisms they are presently employing.

I realised the need for some parameters to guide me in the choice of respondents (out of the probable lot I could have interviewed). I thus chose, with the exception of one²⁸, those who had been at the camp since its inception in 1990. Out of my concern for gathering rich, detailed narratives and to avoid dealing superficially with many of them, I selected five life histories (See McCracken 1988)²⁹. This corresponded to the five main categories I considered. It comprised of a so-called “camp” girl-child; a woman heading a female-headed household; a respondent who had benefited from one of the durable solutions; a skilled woman and finally, a man, not for his sake but, mainly for his perceptions on issues affecting women/children on the camp vis-à-vis men as well as other views of interest to the refugees (see appendix 1). These could easily become cumbersome and thus difficult to analyse properly for any relevant

outcomes if they were too many. My use of illustrative sampling combined with a snowball method enabled me to effect the necessary changes in my choice of life history respondents. I carried out shadow life history interviews (adding up to ten life histories in all; appendix 2) under each category, in some cases, selecting two or more respondents in the same category and conducted other informal interviews too. All the stories have been very insightful in promoting my understanding of the refugee situation and life as it is lived on the camp. I have had to select a few to enable a more detailed discussion. These together with notes from informal conversations, observations, etc. have, however, been used in the analysis where relevant and duly acknowledged. All said, I selected not only ones who best suited the aims of the research, but who also provided very enriching accounts of their lives and experiences. All were not necessarily the educated or the most articulate speakers but at least, they were willing participants (see Miles and Crush 1993; Valentine 2001; Creswell 2003).

Thompson (1981) highlights the flexibility of the life history method. Contrasting it with the classic survey which is concerned with the question's relevance to a given hypothesis, he indicates that this method is based more on a combination of exploration and questioning. This exercise is further situated in a context where the researcher is in dialogue with the informant, thus encouraging an interchange that is as sensitive to his/her views as they satisfy the former's quest for understanding. Several authors (see Francis 1992, Skonhofs 1998) note that where actors are in a position to talk about their lives, as I seek to do in my study, they open up as the interview progresses. Having this in mind and to enhance rigour, I designed and used an interview guide. I loosely structured the questions around three main periods in their lives; Life before, during and after flight, the latter focusing on their lives in the camp. I also realised that allowing our chats to follow a natural conversation course was useful. Combining use of the interview guide with the conversational style, helped prevent us from straying entirely. Though a measure of straying, I would argue, was necessary for me to arrive at the details I sought.

Thus said, and as with any other research methods, I anticipated some challenges and limitations in using this technique. Some scholars point to its non-representativeness (Eyles and Perri 1993). Simonsen (1993) differs on this point arguing that life is an expression for something personal as well as a social history and thus it is possible to make generalisations from any life. However, as already said, I am neither concerned with representativeness nor making generalisations from the life histories with respect to the whole refugee population. I

only hoped this method would provide me with an in-depth understanding of the respondents' life as they experience it.

Another limitation is what Pratt and Loizos (1992) refer to as "edited highlights" of a person's experience, referring to respondent's inability to remember everything accurately, thus giving partial information that may not be wholly truthful and is coloured by socio-cultural biases. Their suggested solution is to give no greater (but no lesser) credence than any other kind of information produced by people, and extracted by researchers. Francis (1992) confirms this indicating that her informants had a certain vagueness about dates and ages, giving an inaccurate account of the past and of many informants' views being coloured by nostalgia. Her most challenging problem though was that of respondents withholding information. She however suggests that these problems could be overcome to an extent, by starting with innocuous topics and slowly working one's way towards more sensitive subjects. This advice generally proved useful during our conversations because the respondents warmed up and thus spoke more freely as our discussions progressed. It was much easier then to go back on some issues on which they were not so forthcoming. Compared with my past experience in interviewing Ghanaian women (Tete 2001), I must admit that Liberians are more open in discussing certain issues of a sensitive nature and this was true of my respondents. The respondents remembered, sometimes in great detail, the dates that marked important changes in their lives and those who could not make up for it by relating events that happened around that time which could later be collated with existing records. They were of course blanks in memory but also things that they had forced themselves to forget and didn't want to bring back to mind.

Miles and Crush (1993:85) rightly observe: "the interpersonal context of the interview, (especially the power relations of class, race and gender between interviewer and interviewee) may significantly affect the content and nature of the information which emerges...it is thus illusive for researchers to claim that they are objective and neutral collectors of facts". I particularly saw the need to establish a good rapport with the respondents, a trusting one that would encourage them to be forthcoming with their views. This was not easy initially and most demanded to know exactly who I was, where I was coming from and why I was there. Apparently, there had been many "researchers", especially newsmen posing as such, making them a bit wary of our lot. I honestly identified myself as a Ghanaian studying in Norway who was there to learn about and from them. Since Norway has recently started a resettlement

programme in this particular camp, knowing that I was a student here might have coloured their views and raised their expectations to an extent. I emphatically made it clear that I was in no way linked to this and was not in a position to grant them any physical benefits except to contribute to understanding of their lives intellectually or at best, contribute to policy formation. Assuring them thus of the importance of their “knowledge” really helped³⁰. Preparing them mentally for the interview and building their anticipation by briefing them as much as possible on what it could entail, was very useful as reflected in their eagerness to be interviewed when the time came for it.

Worthy of mention is the good word that the Camp management as well as the LRWC officials put in on my behalf, even introducing me personally to some respondents in some instances. As I later learnt, they even went as far as acknowledging my presence in the camp for research purposes at some workshops. This, to an extent, influenced my being accepted by most people; something that was possible because I first contacted and actively sought the permission of the “gatekeepers” in charge of the refugees, namely the UNHCR, the GRB, the Camp Management and the LRWC (see Grbich 1999; Creswell 2003). An official letter of introduction from NTNU was also very instrumental in my being accepted. Whilst these proved useful in providing contacts and served as an ice-breaker, I must add that the rest was up to me with respect to who, what and how to go about the process. I also interviewed some respondents through other means and contacts.

Slim and Thompson (1993) indicate that oral histories, in general, have proved very useful in understanding how people cope with disasters, such as drought, famine, flood, war and displacement. They can also be valuable in recognising different experiences lived by refugees (Skonhoft 1998). The first step then, according to Slim and Thompson (2003), is to enable the refugees describe their situation, experiences and strategies. This is what I have tried to achieve by concentrating on their narratives through the use of life history testimonies.

4.3.2 Participant Observation

It is a technique that involves living, working and spending periods of time in a particular “community”, here the camp, in order to understand people’s (refugees’) lived experiences in the context of their everyday lives (Valentine 2001). Marshall and Rossman (1995:79) assert: “observation then entails the systematic noting and recording of events, behaviours and artefacts in a social setting”. Walcott (1995) adds that in interviews “you get nosy” whilst in

observations, one watches as events unfold. It thus relies on the observer's ability to interpret what is happening and why (Kitchin and Tate 2000:219). They (ibid: 221) state, "it involves sharing life experiences and becoming a member of the observer's social world. Grbich (1999:123) adds: "It involves a researcher spending time in an environment observing behaviour, action and interaction, so that he/she can understand the meanings constructed in that environment and can make sense of everyday life experiences". Doing so will admittedly take time.

From the latter part of June through the first week in August, I undertook my observation at the camp. During the reconnaissance surveys and the first few days of stay, I covertly observed the layout, organisation of the camp community to acquaint myself with the surroundings and life there in general. This served as a foundation for my actual observation in July/August and provided me with some useful contacts in the camp. My stay, first within the camp and later within the village, whilst partly due to the availability of accommodation, afforded me the opportunity to observe life from both angles. For the most part of my stay however, I observed overtly by revealing my intentions to the refugees right from the beginning. I attempted to build a trusting relationship with them by assuring them of the importance of their experiences/views and my willingness to learn from them, seeing things their way. This must have worked as evidenced by my respondents' willingness to share their stories of sufferings, joys, hopes and dreams – ones that were very humbling and that I sometimes felt I was not entitled to. Apart from the various interview appointments we scheduled, I regularly walked about in the camp, visited other homes, ate the various greens, home-made biscuits, butter bread (cakes) I came to be fond of and in the process had many informal conversations that would provide me much contextual insight into the lives of Liberians before, during and after the war.

It was not all rosy however. Unfortunately, I was unable to eat the much-liked, crunchy spring chicken (whole frog in soup) and the popular but tediously prepared "kiss me" shells. This could have been a likely platform and source of great conversations about the Liberian way of life. Much could be observed at night especially on Sunday when the Broad Street teemed with the sad "realities" of life in the camp, 18 +18 = 18 being the spot at the centre of it all. The philosophy behind the name is that once young or old found themselves on that street at that time, all parental, age, social, moral restrictions were invalid. The events here being very much a part of life in the camp (as it greatly depicts the epiphanies of life at the camp), I

attempted to get snaps here, nearly securing myself severe beatings. But with the help of the NWT officials, who were themselves very uncomfortable, I would have been in serious trouble. The mandate of the famous NWT seemed to stop at the borders of this area at night, even if their central booth was located just a few metres away from it. The lack of electricity coupled with some reported incidents of muggings, killings made it not only difficult, but inadvisable to remain in the camp beyond 7 pm, except on very few occasions. This lack I tried to compensate for by observing as much as I could during the day. However, since day and night go hand in hand to form the whole reality of life in the camp, some rich details could have been lost. Though similarities did exist, I am aware that the considerable differences in our respective culture might have coloured my value judgements to an extent, but in the end, it was their views that counted.

I am fully conscious of the serious limitations imposed upon this exercise by the limited time within which it was carried out, especially it is usually to be done over long periods of time. Spending a lot more time would undoubtedly have been very enriching. Thus said, my main method was the life history testimonies, so this whole observation exercise was a sort of contingency or back-up plan to help me decide the best perspective to employ in selecting respondents for the life histories and to provide a better contextual understanding of the refugees' experiences. Limb and Dwyer (2001:220) indicate that the directness of the observation approach provides a degree of validity as it concentrates on what people really do as opposed to what they say they will, especially as words and actions are not equivalent in real life. This brings us to the issues of the validity and reliability of my chosen methodology which will be discussed shortly.

4.3.3 Focus Group Discussion

In seeking a life history respondent for the camp child category, I decided to use a student from the Budumburam Secondary School since education was one of the issues I hoped to explore. I had to contact a "gatekeeper", Mr Tailey, who happened to be the headmaster of the Senior Secondary Section. Having interviewed him previously as a key informant, he was aware of my research intentions and co-operated. I wanted a student who had been in the camp since 1990 but since they were writing exams, it was difficult for me to access any at the time. In a follow up visit, he had brought together a mixed (2 girls, 4 boys) group of 6 "camp children" of varying ages all in the 10th grade. After explaining the reason for the interview and seeking their consent, I decided to conduct a group interview as it could be

interesting for several practical reasons (see Aish 2001). This category being a “problematized” group in the camp, I sought to test the main issues to explore with the life history that would be relevant and possibly select one of them for that purpose. Having had little control over their selection and the decisions that informed it however, I was quite concerned as to its fruitfulness but it turned out to be productive. I facilitated, alternating between the use of an interview guide and further exploration of any other questions that came up, with the help of my research assistant. They each gave accounts of their lives as they had experienced it till date, whilst generally discussing their views on life for the youth as well as the challenges they faced growing up in the camp. I retained the two girls for further conversation with a view to using one of them for the life history. Curiously, they were shy with each other than they were when together with the boys and did not provide any new insights than they had done earlier. The whole exercise however provided insight and served as background information for the life account that would be conducted later. They thus helped to build on, verify and add depth to this account (Kitchen and Tate 2000). Parts of their views would be re-echoed when I finally did the life history interview of the camp girl. But more than that, their accounts provided enriching details as to how and why they faced the particular challenges they did, even if not exhaustively so. It also contributed to the analysis and discussion of the educational prospects available to the youth on the camp.

4.3.4 In-depth Interviews of Key Persons

Key persons are “people anticipated to have particular insights or opinions about the topic under study” (Mikkelsen 1995:75). Whilst this is not always the case, they could have a position within an institution and are considered to possess considerable knowledge in the field of enquiry. These could be officials, community leaders and so on. In this study, I planned to interview a few of such key informants, not for their beliefs and/or experiences, but for “facts” and information about the research topic. I ended up interviewing not a few, but a wide array of key persons in various areas including, but not limited to, GRB, UNHCR, Camp Management, LRWC, NWT officials, the Social Counsellor, educators and NGO leaders respectively. The use of an interview guide helped explore various relevant topics (See appendices 3 and 4B).

In view of the security issues I was addressing coupled with the fact that their name came up ever so often, I hoped to interview the police for their views on issues raised. This could however not materialise due to bureaucratic and administrative bottlenecks on their part and a

lack of time on my part to pursue an interview appointment to the very end³¹. Whilst this is regrettable, I believe it has not compromised the quality of information gathered from various officials, other security apparatus in place for the refugees and from the field through direct observations. As earlier indicated, talking to these persons not only provided me with much background information, but facilitated my access to and free movement in the camp to carry out my observations and life history interviews. Their views were also employed in the analysis to provide a contextual understanding of the structures and services in place and to establish the ways in which they enable and/or constrain the refugees to manage their situation. However, since there is a danger of “being misled” (Mikkelsen 1995) by key informants’ sometimes biased information, I neither view them as “experts” nor hold their views as being reflexive of respondent’s own experiences.

4.3.5 Secondary Data

To supplement the primary data, I gathered information from various secondary sources. These included books, official documents from the UNHCR office and website, materials from other Internet sources; the Camp’s bi-monthly newspaper – the Vision; a video recording of UNHCR Officials and a Refugee lady as part of the World Refugee Day Celebrations, and other sources. Combining the state-of-the art documents in the field with an in-depth interview of the officials yielded a pool of background information and the contextual understanding needed to support the individual narratives.

4.4 Validity and Reliability of the Research Methodology

“All good studies aim to be valid and reliable” (Kitchin and Tate 2000:34), qualitative research is no exception. As Silverman (1994) argues, issues of validity and reliability apply just as much to qualitative-based studies as they do to quantitative ones. In other words, qualitative research should be more than “telling convincing stories” (ibid.). Whilst it takes exception to vigorous scientific objectivity in favour of subjectivity, qualitative research is no less rigorous in seeking to employ methods that allow as much objectivity as possible within the frame of any particular study.

According to Kitchin and Tate (2000:34, 35), “validity concerns the soundness, legitimacy and relevance of a research theory and its investigations or practice, whilst reliability refers to repeatability or consistency of a finding”. Kirk and Miller (1986) indicate that reliability is the degree to which the findings are independent of accidental circumstances of the research

and validity is the degree to which the finding is interpreted in a correct way. They assert that the latter touches people's subjective experiences and are quick to add that perfect validity is not even theoretically attainable (ibid.). For the purpose of this study, suffice to say, validity and reliability are about the trustworthiness and intensiveness of the data collected, the methods employed in arriving at these and the appropriateness of the theories applied. I would however argue, as have other researchers (ibid.), that validity is more relevant in qualitative research which deals with fewer units but much detail, as well as the appropriateness of the methodology and analysis in view of the research questions posed. In other words, the methods should be "properly married" to theory such that the research is philosophically sound and adopts appropriate methodologies of data generation and analysis (Kitchin and Tate 2000).

To ensure as much validity as possible, I took several measures. I conducted the interviews personally to enable me probe further, clear up any misunderstandings resulting from miscommunication and to ensure that the information had been accurately recorded. Follow-up questions were asked to clear up possible confusion. This was supplemented with tape recordings of almost all interviews and the use of research assistants to capture as much details as possible and to facilitate my observation of the non-verbal actions of respondents. All these are important in ensuring cogency between what is said and the actual practice, as these are not always complimentary or convergent. Conducting most of the interviews and/or visiting them at "home", at various times also afforded me the opportunity to directly observe how they actually lived. Considering the uniqueness of each refugee's experience, I acknowledge that interviewing a lot more people under various categories could have produced enriching information and would have been a very rewarding experience but time, academic and other constraints were not enabling in this regard. I however interviewed a few more than I originally set out to do to increase the validity of the data collected.

The data was analysed manually. I am conscious of the need to employ rigorous analytical tools that complement the methods used. This ensures results that are truly representative of the data collected, enabling one to draw appropriate conclusions that are not only reflexive of my research concerns but of the views of the respondents. I have tried to analyse the data in a way that will not put my words and meanings into their accounts. To organise and prepare it, I painstakingly transcribed the numerous tapes and field notes collected. The former exercise was most challenging due to the background noise coupled with the speed with which

Liberian English is usually spoken. However, the experiences lived in the field, my diary entries coupled with this, arduous as it is, enabled me to intimately familiarise myself with the information gathered. Working thus with the information helped me get a general sense of it, to write notes in the margins and to formulate themes. I further categorised the latter in a matrix to come up with sub-themes to facilitate cross-referencing and to see the convergent and/or divergent views arising from the various narratives. This helped interconnect themes into a storyline and provided deeper insight into the issues that were of concern to the respondents. I also coded in-vivo drawing on the terms used by respondents to express their views about various issues. In the course of the discussion, I have mentioned ways in which the information collected under various methods were analysed. The findings were presented in four sections, three of which widely used refugees' narratives. Detailed discussions of several themes and sub-themes were done drawing on multiple perspectives from respondents and quotations from other sources. Pictures were also employed to help visualise and explain. Filtering these through the various theoretical and conceptual lenses helped convey research-based meanings and suggest useful ways of dealing with the protracted situation in which they find themselves. In doing all these and in interpreting what I consider to be interactive texts, I cannot dissociate myself from the value judgements and the personal biases that are likely to occur due to our different socio-cultural backgrounds. By giving prominence to and airing as much of the respondent's views as possible, I hope to have reduced this and enabled them tell their stories the way they wanted it told (See Miles and Crush 1993; Creswell 1998, 2003).

With respect to reliability, Löfgren (1996) encourages questioning one's sources by assessing the extent to which the data collected reflects the reality one intended to study, Questions like, "will I interview the right people?", "will my observation be correct and adequate?", "is my material strategic and relevant?", "can the data be technically accepted?", etc., are all relevant in this regard. However, by pointing out various limitations of my chosen research methodology throughout my discussion as well as the probable ways to counter these, I believe I have somehow dealt with both measures to an appreciable extent, even if not exhaustively so. Besides, my insistence on using different but complementary qualitative methods of enquiry to serve as a check, one on the other, reflects my concern for validity and reliability. In line with this, Mikkelsen (1995:31) asserts, "biases do not disappear, but the use of triangulation for cross-checking information enhances the validity of research results".

Issues of the researcher's positionality vis-à-vis the respondents are also relevant here. So is it with "outsider"/ "insider" ones. Conducting fieldwork among people (Liberians) of a different culture, coupled with the language challenge earlier mentioned (not so significant as to greatly hamper the collection of data though), could make me an outsider in many ways. I tried to counter these by assuring the respondents of the importance of their "knowledge", that is, their narratives, to the whole research exercise. In this sense, they were very much the "experts" and I, the privileged, captivated audience striving to make sense of their life stories, empathising with the range of emotions this evoked in them whilst facilitating the conversation as best I could. This, added to the honest identification of my research intentions, and myself as a student seeking understanding of their displacement experiences, hopefully went a long way in addressing these particular problems. However, these factors could, perhaps, reduce some of the accuracy of information gathered.

Drawing on various theories and concepts from human geography, especially that of space/place, actor-oriented and feminist geographies, has enabled me to pay attention to the subjective experiences of the refugee. It has also enabled me to consider the implications that these theoretical considerations have with respect to policy implementation as well as their life choices.

All said, I believe the data I arrive at is result of the methods applied. The life history approach, in combination with the others, has provided a deep insight into the life of the refugees. There are probably other methods I could have employed but, as I have sought to demonstrate throughout the discussion, I believe the ones chosen suit my research intentions best. As the famous Ghanaian adage goes, "wisdom is not the sole preserve of only one person" so, I have remained open to suggestions that might occasion possible changes. This is actually in line with the "spirit of flexibility" so characteristic of qualitative research.

4.5 Going to the field/ Field Experiences

Having identified the various actors as the government agencies and authorities involved in the life of refugees as well as the refugees themselves, my field plan was to seek access to these and to the camp where I would carry out participant observations (July to 1st week in August) and interviews.

On the 14th of June, I carried out my first reconnaissance survey on the camp. This was useful in making tentative arrangements for accommodation and making a few contacts with a view to staying there during the month of July. During all this time, I was looking for opportunities to make contact with some officials and institutions concerned, like the GRB and UNHCR-Ghana. Then a television programme was aired on the 16th of June featuring Thomas Albrecht, the UNHCR-Ghana Representative and Ms. Abraham, the Co-Chairperson (Administration) of the LRWC. The latter would later grant me not only a key informant interview, but was helpful in other ways as well. This and a sister programme featuring two other officials from the UNHCR-Ghana office, both of whom I later contacted, was to mark the World Refugee Day Celebrations (TV Africa 2004 a, b). I took some useful notes and later arranged to get copies of these tapes from the Programmes Manager of TV Africa, which I did. This would serve as a secondary source of data. Subsequently, a friend gave me a contact in UNHCR-Ghana who was instrumental in getting me introduced for a key interview appointment with some officials there.

The actual celebration of the World Refugee day was on the 19th of June at the National Theatre. I attended the occasion and met a number of refugees, spoke to a young refugee girl about life in general on the camp and got an additional contact at UNHCR-Ghana. I briefly mentioned my research intentions and she gave me the assurance to call anytime later for an appointment. She was the Public Relations officer and would prove instrumental in getting me other concrete contacts during my stay on the camp. I also got to know of the Chairman of the GRB, an important “gatekeeper” and potential facilitator for my access to the refugees. I then learnt of an extended celebration of the Refugee Day at the Camp on the 21st of June and fixed my second reconnaissance survey to coincide with this date.

On the bus to the camp, I met two young Liberian ladies who lived on the camp and proved to be very useful guides when we got there. They gave me a guided tour of the whole camp as well as the surrounding villages and explained briefly about the geographical/administrative organisation of the camp. They also touched on life in the camp on a daily basis especially that of young ones like themselves and the relationship between the refugees/Ghanaians living in the surrounding villages. These were all relevant areas I would further explore during the actual research process. Though not much was retained, it was necessary in giving me an oversight of the camp and life there.

My first visit to the UNHCR-Ghana offices was on the 21st of June where my previous contact introduced me to Jane Mugai, the Protection Officer. She took my research synopsis, gave me some websites to read about them, their activities, etc and to prepare for the interview so as to eliminate repetitions. She also preferred that I go out for the observation before speaking to them finally as a cross-check and to enable them fill in any holes where necessary. She eventually assigned me to her assistant who was the key informant to be interviewed on behalf of UNHCR-Ghana. She also gave me the go-ahead to access the camp as far as I could take care of my own accommodation and other needs. It was also prudent to get consent from the GRB so I tried to get an appointment with the Chairman on the 24th of June. He was away but I was referred to his assistant who not only granted me a key interview on their behalf later, but also gave me permission to access the camp and speak to their representatives there if necessary. This would be crucial in enabling me access to the camp authorities for key interviews and other practical matters.

Preparations were well advanced now for my stay on the camp for participant observation. Before leaving, I spoke to the Public Relations Officer (PRO) to fix a definite appointment for the UNHCR interview. She also advised that I come after my stay but further provided me some names of people to contact, including the Camp Management, the LRWC and some NGOs. She did not mind my mentioning her and this, combined with the earlier permissions granted, greatly facilitated my access to many of the key interviews on the camp. As one informant put it, “we’re helping because Needa from the UNHCR said you are here for research purposes and we should co-operate with you”. I must say that the willingness to cooperate on the part of all these “gatekeepers” is worth commending.

On the 29th of June, I finally arrived on the camp to stay for my participant observation and interviews through the month of July. My Christian brothers kindly offered me accommodation with some Christian sisters who were there on a witnessing assignment for the months of June and July. These were all students from the University of Ghana who doubled as my research assistants on various occasions. We first stayed on the camp and later moved to the village, both of which afforded me the opportunity to observe, first-hand, how life was for the refugees, and to speak informally to quite a number of them. Before settling however, I made a detour to the University of Cape-Coast for a supervisory meeting set up by my supervisor at NTNU. Meeting Prof. Awusabo-Asare was useful in helping me define the

parameters to employ in selecting my life history respondents and in reflecting critically on my chosen methodological approach.

I spent the first few days familiarising myself with the camp layout to enable easy movement, passively observing, talking informally to people, securing contacts and so on. I had my first “real” interview in the camp on the 5th of July with the Co-Chairperson (Administration). She introduced me to other contacts. I also contacted the Camp Management and interviewed Mr. Obidieh, who provided a rich stock of background information on the camp and also introduced me to yet others. The ball was set going. Appointments were fixed, observations made, life history interviews conducted and the rest, they say, is history. Unfortunately, I was unable to speak to the Police on the camp. Taking pictures sometimes proved to be a real challenge with a few threats attached especially when it captured negative life patterns. The reactions were also due to wariness towards newsmen who had apparently taken snaps to feature negative stories about the refugees.

As with all research endeavours and especially with participant observations, one always leaves with the feeling that there could have been more to observe, interview and discover but there comes a point when one has to stop in order to make sense of all the data collected. This came for me on the 5th of August when I had to leave the camp definitively. I left clutching on to information that would hopefully enable me to write life documents that “speak to the human dignity, the sufferings, the hopes, the dreams, the lives gained and the lives lost”, by the people I studied (Denzin 1989:83) at the Gomoa-Budumburam Refugee “Settlement” in Ghana.

Back in Accra, I set about getting secondary data documents, going through my data, indexing the tape recordings of the interviews to correspond to the notes taken, etc. My last interview was at the UNHCR-Ghana office on the 10th of August where I finally had a key interview with the Senior Protection Assistant. I was also given some documents as secondary data. The last week to the 17th of August when I finally returned was spent putting everything together, collecting the tapes earlier mentioned and in preparations towards coming.

I have been back since the 18th of August twisting my mind, transcribing tapes and trying to make sense of all the information collected under the guiding gaze of my supervisor.

In the following section, I present the analysis and results of the findings. I will start by examining the institutions in place as a contextual basis for the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 5: Institutional Support

In this chapter, I will present some institutions that deal with the refugees in their protracted situation and the sort of services they have been offering to them. In doing this, I hope to explore ways in which these structures, through their interventions, have served to either enable or constrain the refugees as they strive to manage their situation. I will start by providing an overview of some³² institutions in place and proceed with their functions or the ways in which they work. I will draw largely on key informant interviews conducted with various institutions on the camp and their claims to the services provided till date.

As already indicated, the Ghana Government acts through the GRB, which is represented by the Settlement Management on the camp; There is also the NWT; the UNHCR, its implementing partners and sister organizations; the LRWC and a host of other NGOs and CBOs³³, some of whom have affiliations with other international organizations. In seeking to address the welfare needs of the refugees, most of these collaborate on issues of common interest.

5.1 The Ghana Refugee Board (GRB)

With the first ship to evacuate stranded Ghanaians came a wave of refugees who were not self-settled but needed the services of the government of Ghana. Subsequent arrivals necessitated the systematization of ways to deal with refugees and asylum seekers, mechanisms that had hitherto been adhoc or even non-existent. The GBR was constituted under law and mandated by the government to deal with all issues relating to refugee in Ghana. It thus claims to have the primary responsibility of seeing to the welfare of all refugees, Liberian refugees included. Among its responsibilities is the provision of security for the refugees, granting refugee status, assisting refugees in seeking employment and other practicalities relating to their stay in Ghana³⁴. They do these in collaboration with other local and foreign institutions involved in various aspects of refugees' lives. Whilst the Board has mandated the Settlement Management to deal with its day to day activities and concerns on the camp, it directly handles status-determination issues in collaboration with the UNHCR.

5.1.1 Status Determination

“People who apply for refugee status need to establish individually that their fear of persecution is well-founded. However, during mass exodus ... it may not be possible to carry out individual screening. In such circumstances, particularly when civilians are fleeing for similar reasons, it maybe appropriate to declare “group” determination of refugee status, whereby each civilian is considered as a refugee, prima facie – in other words, in the absence of evidence to the contrary”. UNHCR note on Individual Status Determination (UNHCR 2003)

Ghana’s refugee status determination policy deviates little, if at all, from the standard above. Owing to the arrival en masse of Liberian refugees in Ghana in the 1990’s, they were granted prima facie or group refugee status. Citing the case of refugees in Kenya who have also been granted prima facie status, Hyndman (2000) indicates that they are entitled to assistance through the good offices of the UNHCR but remain in a practical sense, second-rate refugees. Whilst refugees in Ghana have freedom of movement, their de facto status denies them the advantages associated with an individual status. Individual status determination is only done when it becomes necessary to pinpoint those who have a special case. This enables the authorities to tell who is a P1, P2 or P3 case and thus eligible for resettlement. The Board insists that their sheer numbers and the conditions under which they came dictate that they fall under the OAU convention³⁵ and have de facto recognition. This however denies them the opportunity of resettlement until their case has been individually considered and status granted thereafter. The government, however, does not view this as its responsibility. It actually considers anything beyond granting prima-facie status as “bending over” for the refugees. It is thus left to the individual’s efforts and abilities to convince the authorities of the genuineness of one’s case, if ever the opportunity presents itself, in order to qualify for this privilege³⁶. It was not until after the failed voluntary repatriation exercise in 1997 that individual status determination was commenced to deal with the residual caseload³⁷.

What they have been given is an ID card. This grants them recognition as ones who have sought refuge in Ghana. It ensures that they are documented and maintained on the register as persons of concern³⁸. The onus however falls on the refugees to present themselves to the authorities. This, according to the Board, is the least they can do as persons who have entered into somebody’s territory. For various reasons³⁹ however, some could not get the ID card. It is their responsibility then to report at the Accra Office and declare themselves in order to be registered. This is especially the case as the first official phase of registration and

documentation carried out on the camp is over. The poor who are unable to do so risk not having the card. From all indications, the exercise was fraught with bureaucratic bottlenecks and various other problems⁴⁰.

The card does not confer any benefits to the holder but can serve as a protection in the case of police arrest. It also enables one to access certain advantages peculiar to the camp. Even though the card categorically states that they are not entitled to work; this is subject to the Ghana Refugee Law which allows them to work. So if they did find a job requiring a work permit, all efforts would be made to enable them acquire one. The reality is that, whilst work permits are readily available, jobs are not!⁴¹

5.2 The Settlement Management

It is manned by a staff of four⁴² and represents the GRB in coordinating all activities on the camp, especially security. It protects the territorial boundaries of about 141 acres within the camp and three other settlement zones in the adjacent village. It has the responsibility of allocating houses to the vulnerable and ensuring that houses within the camp are not sold⁴³. It works together with the LRWC which reports to it. It also handles correspondence from various individuals and organizations interested in helping the refugees, among others.

5.2.1a) Security

The GRB and the Management consider the provision of security to the refugees as their primary responsibility. The police have thus been provided to ensure their safety. From an initial number of 5, they have been increased to 12 at present, 4 of whom are women. The UNHCR however indicates that of the proposed 16-member police personnel who are supposed to be on the camp, most have not taken up their post due to the lack of accommodation⁴⁴. It is quick to admit that the police presence is woefully inadequate since they cater, not only to the needs of the refugees but the surrounding villages.

As is generally the case in Ghana, case follow-ups are also very slow as they are court-based. Other genuine cases may just fall through the cracks due to inefficiencies on the part of the police. Cases may thus only be thoroughly addressed if the refugees are persistent enough and/or manage to get it to the attention of the IGP; something that hardly happens, if ever. There is also pressure on the police to take “quick action” in dealing with culprits, though this is not part of their duty. Training programmes are thus under way to help them better

understand refugee protection issues, and be a more sensitive police force. It is also to prevent them from creating a paramilitary situation that might lead to the abuse of the refugees by locking them up, maltreating them, and so on. In the absence of these measures, there is a risk of the refugees losing confidence in the very people who are supposed to ensure their safety. This will also increase the likelihood of their creating a “pseudo police force” of the NWT. The latter, however, are to maintain a strictly civilian nature as they assist the police in dealing with their fellow refugees.

Fig. 3 Police Station on the camp; Fig. 4 Office of the NWT; Fig. 5 Some members of the Women’s auxiliary of the NWT; Fig. 6 Key Interview with Head of Women’s Auxiliary



Source: Head of Women’s Auxiliary

Source: Researcher’s own Photographs

5.2.1(b) The Neighbourhood Watch Team (NWT)

It started as a refugee-initiated Vigilante group to counter the increasing crime⁴⁵ that earned Budumburam the title of a “hotbed of crime” in the host country, Ghana. From what was an adhoc grouping of some young men to help fight the crime, it has since its inauguration in 2003 been officially named, the Budumburam Neighbourhood Watch Team.

Given the low capacity of the police and the increasing number of camp residents to deal with, this initiative was more than welcome. The Settlement Management and the LRWC cooperated in constituting it. The Ghana Police not only accepted their statute, but provided screening and training services for its members. UNHCR came in to sponsor and support it by providing logistics like overalls, raincoats, torches, whistles, wooden batons and boots to all

the members. It also provided training on the prevention of and response to gender-based violence (CMt 2003). From time to time, it also provides some food and non-food items as an incentive package⁴⁶.

From its 200-member provision by the statute, it has grown to a 350 membership, 50 of whom are women. Volunteers are recruited from different backgrounds⁴⁷. The female volunteers, who serve as the auxiliary arm of the team, are provided training on gender roles and the incidence of GBV. This consolidates and equips them to deal with women and children's issues like domestic violence, child abuse, to mention a few⁴⁸. They also educate men to desist from violence against women. They cooperate closely with WISE, an International NGO in charge of handling and following up women's issues on the camp. A sort of curfew or what they refer to as "movement control" has been instituted from 12pm to 5am. The head indicates that their work intensifies at this time even though they work a 24-hour shift⁴⁹ and are operational in all 12 zones. Apart from security, the head indicates that they are engaged in what he calls "social work". This includes sanitation; assisting in reuniting lost and found children with their parents; assisting new arrivals to locate their relatives/friends and helping them to locate temporary shelter until then; assisting the sick especially during the curfew hours; rescuing and counseling Sexual and GBV victims, and so on.

The team leader indicated that in the past, threats to women were assaults and rape but at present, it is domestic violence, child abuse and sodomy. The latter is hardly reported because it involves family members. Commenting on the security situation in the camp, he asserts that the crime rate has gone down to about 90 percent. Adding on to this, the GRB claimed that the police together with the NWT have managed to bring crime almost to a halt⁵⁰.

With respect to authority, the Statute provides that "they organize themselves as a non-governmental, non-political and non-profitable organization...while acknowledging the ultimate responsibility of the host government to provide security in their camp". They are thus to adhere strictly to the civilian character of their stay in Ghana and their residence in the camp (see Statute of the NWT in CMt 2003). Commenting on this, the team leader indicated that they consider themselves to be the extended arm of the police, so if they observe anything constituting a security threat, they report it to them. Also, anything that happens with a criminal background is referred to the police for appropriate action.

Being the ears and eyes of the police dealing directly with their own on the camp however means that they get to handle a lot of cases involving the refugees. These have a lot of confidence in the NWT. The latter are also of the view of that it is better to handle cases of their kin so as to prevent them from getting criminal records which will worsen their refugee case. This, coupled with the slow rate of case follow-ups and the increasing reliance of the refugees on the NWT to resolve their problems, are a cause for concern. Whilst this can help clear up problems before they become potentially dangerous, there is a need for caution so they do not end up presuming the role of the police. As the CMt (2004:157) observes, “involvement of the camp population instills a sense of vested interest and belonging, but caution must be exercised, however, to ensure that particular groups do not exercise inappropriate control”. This will compromise the civilian nature of their mandate.

Thus said, the efforts of the NWT in helping to ensure the security needs of their community members is worth commending, as is their efforts to respond to female-specific security concerns. An issue of concern expressed by the head of the Women’s Auxiliary is the need that arises in the course of their duty to take in street children and unaccompanied ones. Though some prefer to return to streets, the contrary is often the case. She thus expressed an urgent need for shelter to accommodate these until such a time when they can be properly placed. Even though their work is strictly on a voluntary basis and thus non-remunerated, further incentives would always be a welcome boost as they strive to dispense of their duties. This, though, is not to be an expected conditionality in discharging their duties as efficiently as possible.

Since it is still in its relatively early stages of operation, it remains to be seen how this young but promising institution evolves over time. It is one worth streamlining and strengthening, however, to enable it continue ensuring this basic right of the residents - physical security.

5.3 Official Views on Durable Solutions

5.3.1 Voluntary Repatriation (VR)

With regards to the durable solutions, the Board asserts: “as a member of the community of nations, we fully support all three solutions proposed”. The preference, however, is for return to the country of origin. In line with this and with the assumption that Liberia was safe after the Interim government was put in place, an ultimatum was issued to the refugees to either go

or be integrated in Ghana as any foreigner. A fact-finding mission was sent to scout the place after which UNHCR, in collaboration with the Ghanaian authorities, implemented a voluntary repatriation exercise from 1997 to 1999. Indications are that of the about 4000 Liberian refugees who opted to go, many returned⁵¹ after war erupted again. The UNHCR admits that this failure was a result of not doing its homework properly as people returned to a non-rehabilitated Liberia with inadequate infrastructure and other essential facilities. Many thus became disillusioned since there were no follow-ups as to how they could sustain a living back in Liberia. There was also very little disarmament. It is no wonder that the war flared up again and left in its wake, great losses. This included the lives of some returnees who were unable to escape.

Again in 2004, plans were far advanced to carry out another VR exercise in October⁵². The meaning of “home”, especially when applied to the idea of refugees returning to a “home” which might hold nothing for them, is indeed contested. In spite of this, the GRB insists that for refugees, “home is always home”. It thus expects a huge number of Liberians to take advantage of the 2004 exercise as it affords them the opportunity to return in dignity and safety⁵³. This time, the UNHCR claims not to be promoting repatriation, but facilitating it for those who for various reasons, don’t want to stay in Ghana anymore. It is supposedly designed for the many who are attempting to return spontaneously at great risk to their lives. Such is the case despite the admission that honestly speaking, things are pretty bad in Liberia. This worry is compensated for by the assurance that several measures have been put in place to make it a lot easier for the returnees this time round⁵⁴. Observing that most of the refugees are from the Montserrado County, UNHCR claims to be looking at infrastructure there whilst setting up transit centers and make-shift homes. It will also make sure that hospitals and water are being provided even though electricity is not restored to about 90% of the country. It claims that the security situation has improved tremendously because of the presence of the peace-keeping forces. It also admits that there are still a few problem spots with some people getting trigger-happy at times, but disarmament is said to be going on course. Monrovia and its environs are said to be relatively calm as police and all other security apparatus are present. UNHCR asserts that as with all refugee cases, one can only seek refuge in another country if one’s own is unable to offer protection but not just because of a dislike for one’s country and a desire to leave. Implicitly then, Liberia is at present considered safe enough to be able to offer protection to its citizens though the assertions above can at best be tentative. Returnees are to be deregistered from UNHCR-Ghana’s books and will be unable to access Ghana’s

protection. All things being equal, it is claimed that they will benefit from UNHCR's protection in Liberia for some months by receiving food and non-food items. It indicates that specific measures have been taken on behalf of women and children who wish to be repatriated. These are supposedly given a lot of counseling as to the actual situation in Liberia. If they still want to go, they will be given some form of assistance by their office there. They are also being encouraged to take up skill training courses in masonry and other practical areas to manage on their own when they get back. With respect to the journey, they indicate that sea transport will be most likely as road transport through La Cote D'Ivoire is not advisable. Sanitary conditions would be ensured with medical personnel and a UNHCR staff accompanying each vessel. Whilst all these plans are laudable, it remains to be seen how they are implemented in practice. Even if they are, how sustainable will these be in ensuring that the returnees settle and begin to engage in the process of rebuilding their lives afresh? This requires an answer especially when considered within the context of UNHCR's assessment of the situation in Liberia. Commenting on this, it indicates that much has not really changed as the Congo-Indigenous divide is very prominent and people still have deep-seated scores to settle. These very issues, it acknowledges, could easily lead to yet another explosion if education is not intensified⁵⁵. The need for addressing these and other pertinent issues can obviously not be overemphasized if peaceful co-existence is to be achieved.

The UNHCR has earmarked October 2005 as the time when repatriation will be promoted as a durable solution for refugees in Ghana - by which time, it is hoped, things would have greatly improved. This however remains, in essence, a hope.

5.3.2 Reintegration

Several options are available to refugees willing to integrate in Ghana. These are:

- Naturalisation through the Ghana Immigration Service
- Acquisition of Resident permits as a foreigner or extension of stay as an ECOWAS member.
- Ghanaian citizenship through marriage to a Ghanaian National

Whilst these may be legally viable aids to integration, translating them into practice reveals itself to be rather problematic. For instance, one requirement for naturalisation is the ability to speak at least one Ghanaian language. A number of Liberians may understand the local Ghanaian language but few are able to speak it. Even those who can, prefer to use Liberian

English, their Lingua Franca. This is especially so as they complain of Ghanaians discriminating against them on the basis of language. While there are intermarriages, these are not the norm. Besides, Liberians do not even want to integrate for various reasons which are discussed later⁵⁶.

Apparently, as at June 2004, the Board had no detailed official views on reintegration of the refugees except those outlined above. The GRB claims that the government has always been open. It thus allows all refugees, including Liberians, to apply for work permit and to work – if the work is available. In his view, while integration may be desired, it is not to take place just for the sake of it, especially considering that the government has no magic wand to solve all problems. Citing the lack of adequate jobs for its own citizens, he reiterated that Liberians really needed diversified skill training. This, he claims, is an imperative if they are to stand a chance of integrating into the system and competing with Ghanaians for the limited space in the formal sector. It is only after the repatriation exercise that a survey would only be conducted to determine whether the residual caseload want to integrate or not.

While integration is viewed as the second best option by the International community, it is appears that the government is not as keen on its implementation as a long term solution. This is especially the case where it might bring on an added burden for an already over-stretched economy. A situation where the camp will be closed down is however not anticipated. This is logistically impossible under the present circumstances, not to mention how inexpedient it would be politically and legally. Actually, the refugees do indeed have a right to the principle of non-refoulement⁵⁷ in their first country of asylum, if they so wish.

5.3.3 Resettlement

“Resettlement is geared at the special needs of an individual whose life, liberty, health or fundamental human rights are in jeopardy in the country where he or she first sought asylum. It is a highly complex, organized process that involves identifying those in need and finding a suitable country prepared to accept them”.
Colville, R. (1993)

Worldwide, not more than 1% of refugees are resettled in any particular country in any given year. No country is legally obliged to accept resettlement cases and the great majority of states, rarely, if ever, offer these places. However, some states regularly accept cases based on

a quota system. A few also accept, sometimes in relatively large numbers, without restricting themselves to a quota (Chimni 2000; Coleville 1993).

According to the UNHCR, the majority going on resettlement in 2004 were Sierra Leoneans since their repatriation exercise ended in June. Of the about 973 refugees from various West African countries resettled in the USA, Australia and Norway, however, 289 went to Norway; all of whom were Liberians. The percentage of Liberian refugees in Ghana resettled since 1990 is, however, not easily available since most nations have their own resettlement programmes through different agencies. A number of these agencies though, give priority to the UNHCR-listed criteria of people who qualify. These include among others:

- Persons with individual status recognition
- Victims of torture, SGBV, cruel inhuman treatment
- Threatened personal security due to political position
- Vulnerable people like Women at Risk, disabled
- Unaccompanied Children whose ages are easy to place

The three main criteria employed are the P1, P2 and P3⁵⁸ respectively. Resettlement countries also have their own criteria and specifications as to who or what sort of person they want. The Overseas Processing Entity (OPE/Accra) is one such agency. It represents 10 voluntary agencies responsible for the reception and placement of refugees resettled in the United States. It deals with all three criteria mentioned above as well as Visas 92/93 petitions in collaboration with the UNHCR and/or a US embassy. It is administered in Ghana by the Church World Services (CWS). On the 6th and 7th of July 2004, decisions about some Liberians resettled in the US were handed over to the CWS for distribution on the camp⁵⁹. A “Women at Risk” (P1) programme implemented by Canada and the US has apparently been slowed down considerably due to quacks in the system⁶⁰.

Currently on the camp, resettlement to various countries is running concurrently with the VR exercises. Rather than encourage return, people are lingering and clutching on to the hope of making it someday. It is attracting yet others from Liberia. Some of the latter have been known to get stranded and disillusioned after being confronted with the fact that they were only chasing a mirage, after all.

Whilst the UNHCR has expressed the hope that resettlement spaces would be expanded, this depends very much on the willingness of resettlement hosting countries. So while resettlement remains the most desired solution of the majority of refugees, it is also the least accessible. This is due to the dynamics involved in its implementation, not to mention the negative ripple effect of 9/11 on international migration in general. Presently then, in as much as resettlement remains an option from which some might benefit, the reality is that many more refugees will be left behind for whom alternative solutions would have to be found.

5.4 UNHCR

As already indicated, UNHCR's presence in Ghana goes a long way back. At the outset of the Liberian refugee's arrival in Ghana, however, it did not come in so the refugees relied on the government, other organisations and well-wishing locals for assistance.

With the influx of the refugees and its attendant burden of employing the already-overstretched state resources, the government called on the UNHCR to assist. Under UNHCR's direction, the refugees were provided with relief materials and a multi-sectoral programme in collaboration with its sister organisations and various local implementing partners. Among the things provided were tents, food-rations⁶¹, education, skill training programmes and other utility services. Health needs were addressed by the Ghana Red Cross Society (GRCS). Later on, the Liberians were allowed to put up more permanent structures with UNHCR providing wood, plastic roofing sheets, doors, windows, etc. Other aid organisations also helped in the relief efforts. As Dick (2002) observes, the general needs of the Liberian refugees were generally met at the initial stages of their time in Ghana.

Starting in 1997, when the situation in Liberia was deemed safe for return, the Office facilitated a VR exercise. The UNHCR then decided that general refugee assistance in Ghana was no longer warranted. This was done in spite of the fact that the vast majority still remained in the camp after the exercise. It thus resorted to targeted assistance to some vulnerable groups⁶² from 1997 until all assistance was phased out. In June 2000, due to a so-called regional decision⁶³, all forms of material assistance to Liberian refugees in Budumburam ceased completely and UNHCR withdrew its services. The refugees were left on their own to cope. Commenting on this period, the Settlement Management indicated that all sectors of the refugee community were negatively affected. UNHCR asserts: "Since that time, the

settlement has achieved a degree of self-sufficiency and self-regulation”. They admit though that many communal structures and facilities have deteriorated (UNHCR-Ghana 2003).

The war crisis intensified and erupted again in 2002. During this time many more Liberians fled their homes, yet again, and found their way into the camp. As a result, UNHCR re-established a presence in the camp in July 2002, marking the end of a full two-year absence. This time, it is no more giving individual assistance to the refugees and asylum seekers in the camp, but working on a community basis. Its aim in doing this, it claims, is to strengthen resources towards greater self-reliance. Since its return, several processes have been set going including a registration of the refugee population and the issuance of Identity (ID) cards⁶⁴. According to the UNHCR, a comprehensive review of the situation in the camp highlighted several areas in which the settlement had suffered; school attendance is limited due to the lack of education subsidies and facilities; water and sanitation facilities have broken down; there is no steady supply of portable water; many toilet facilities are in a state of disrepair; trash lines the alleys between houses; only a quarter of the camp has electricity and so on. Whilst asserting that much has been achieved since its return - achievements which may long have been attained had it not been absent - it also admits that there remains much work to be done in order to bring Budumburam up to appropriate living standards (UNHCR-Ghana 2003). Some key areas currently benefiting from UNHCR’s reforms are education, health, water and sanitation, social welfare, psycho-social services and micro-finance projects especially for women. Could it have been a different story had UNHCR not withdrawn all its services before being sure of the justification for doing so in the first place? The point here is not about doling out aid to the refugees in their protracted displacement and thus creating dependency. Admitting however to their having shown self-reliance in its absence is in itself a strong indication that given the right help under enabling circumstances, the refugees can and will make it in the situation in which they find themselves. Whilst gratitude is the general attitude towards the UNHCR, concerns have been raised that “father” UNHCR has a tendency to impose programmes on residents without extensive consultation with those for whom they are meant in the first place. Education is one important way in which refugees are able to attain skills that will enable them to cope both in the short term and in the long run. In view of this, I will now consider in detail, UNHCR’s intervention in the area of education. I will also highlight the other areas briefly.

5.4.1 Education

In 2003, UNHCR initiated an education survey throughout the camp. This, it indicates, was to gather information on households, children and young people of school going age. It was to analyse their educational experience in order to better target strategies of community-based assistance in the area of education. The survey was conducted concurrently with the documentation stage of refugee registration. It indicates that the educational profile on all children under 18 and young adults up to the age of 25, was being assessed with a view to addressing their educational needs⁶⁵. To ensure quality education, the refugee community under the leadership of the LRWC has set up a Central Education Board (CEB) which works in concert with the UNHCR in addressing these needs.

The Chairman of the CEB indicated that there are currently 38 academic schools⁶⁶ from the primary to the Senior Secondary School (SSS) level with a total enrolment of about 14,000. All these are Liberian- initiated community or private schools. There is one Ghanaian primary and two Junior Secondary Schools (JSS) with about 85% Liberian enrolment in the village. With respect to the curriculum, the headmaster of the refugee community school indicated that courses are mainly tailored to the Ghanaian educational system. He also claimed that upon completion, students are awarded diplomas and WAEC certificates so they can be absorbed into higher institutions. He also expressed satisfaction with the cooperation of the Ghanaian educational agencies. He however indicated the need for more schools due to the congestion in the classrooms which impeded effective instruction⁶⁷. The chairman also expressed dissatisfaction with the level of education for women on the camp, asserting that the enrolment for girls from the primary to JSS is high. Going beyond this level was however revealed to be problematic for the girls as boys dominated at the higher levels due to a high drop out rate⁶⁸ among the former.

The Chairman indicated that the private schools formerly operated as individual enclaves without benefiting from any assistance. Upon UNHCR's return, the existing schools, both community and private-owned, receive aid including classroom furniture, textbooks and related items in support of the community's efforts. It has also facilitated the training of 250 teachers as well as 26 pre-school teachers in the camp. They are also coming to an agreement where it will pay a small stipend to the teachers to enable the schools drop their fees from between 50-70 percent. This, it is hoped, will take children off the streets and enable the parents to enrol their children in school as some of the burden of fees will be taken away. The

rest of the fees will however have to be covered by the parents. In UNHCR's view, their being made to pay is a way of encouraging parents to be more responsible. This is the case in spite of admitting that the refugees have certain constraints⁶⁹ in finding jobs, etc. Commenting on the high drop out rate among the youth, however, the headmaster cited financial constraints as the main cause. He indicated that since many refugee parents are not gainfully employed, they find it difficult to support their wards. He explained that when the school started, it was fully financed by UNHCR. During its withdrawal, they had no outside support so students had to pay 100% for their tuition as well as other cost.

Acknowledging the need for adequate schools to effectively address the educational concerns of the refugees, the UNHCR commissioned a school building earlier in the year. It also claims to have plans of building additional schools with playgrounds in the camp. The Italian government is also putting up another school in collaboration with a Children Better Way (CBW), a Liberian CBO. The headmaster confirmed that since UNHCR's return, it has been helping the school with some educational supplies and has also proposed to help students by supplementing their fees. He also asserted that few selected students have been sponsored by the UNHCR and some educational foundations have also come in to help students who maintain an excellent record.

Scholarships are currently provided for 142 students through three education projects; DAFI (University), Hophouët-Boigny (SSS) and the Para-Professional, providing training and employment to talented young refugees with a view to empowering them. In the 2003/2004 academic year, about 25 students were offered scholarships to various universities in Ghana; of these, only 4 were female. The chairman reiterated however that since UNHCR's policy is girl-centred, the scholarships were flexible for them. So it was up to them to make use of the opportunity as the doors are really open to them.

Without a doubt, all these efforts are commendable and definitely in the right direction. The reality however bespeaks of more challenges in getting people into the schools and getting them to stay there. This requires addressing other pertinent root causes of their absence rather than just the provision and upgrading of existing structures, even though these are in themselves important. On the other hand, people cannot be forced to be educated unless they want it and are ready to work towards that goal.

5.4.2 Health

Health care provision has been one of the most unstable, albeit important, areas of concern on the camp. Initially, GRCS was the implementing partner responsible for the clinic. AGREDS was responsible for health care from 1994 until 2000 when the clinic had to be closed because it was unable to maintain it when UNHCR's financial support was withdrawn. Qualified Liberians with experience working in the clinic asked to continue running these vital services but they were not authorised as government policy requires Ghanaians to be in charge of all medical institutions (Dick 2002). Residents had to rely on private clinics located just outside the camp but found their services to be too expensive. Some Liberian nurses made home calls or treated sick patients in unregistered home clinics. Some pharmacies also opened around the camp making basic medicines available to the refugees, but increasing the potential for self medication. Apparently, and as UNHCR observed upon return, health care facilities and services were woefully inadequate.

From the initial problems encountered in trying to re-open the clinic, the Catholic Secretariat is presently the implementing partner in charge of health care. The clinic is thus under the purview of Apam Catholic hospital. UNHCR has since expanded the clinic premises to a two-storey facility with wards, a laboratory and a stand-by generator to cater to the needs of the ever-increasing population.

Fig. 7 Older Section of the Clinic on the Camp; Fig. 8 UNHCR-remodeled 2-storeyed extension of clinic



Source: Researcher's own photograph

It is currently staffed by a French doctor whose wife is a nurse, a visiting doctor, three Liberian medical assistants and supporting staff, over 90% of whom are Liberian. The Liberian staff have been given a 2-3 month orientation course at the Apam hospital to enable them operate in Ghana. An ambulance has also been provided for out of camp emergencies and referrals.

The Settlement manager was of the view that services are as good as in any other clinic and subsidised, so they are well patronised now. The Welfare council cooperates with the social welfare counsellor in operating a system of issuing chits to vulnerable ones to enable them access free treatment. The rest are expected to pay a so-called token fee. The residents also go to hospitals in Winneba, Apam and Accra for treatment. According to the refugees, if they are not able to get chits for free or subsidised treatment, especially to hospitals in Accra, they have to pay even higher fees than Ghanaians. This is as a result of their being charged rates like any foreigner.

HIV/AIDS is an issue of concern especially as the majority of cases are young ones. In 2004, there were about 22 reported cases which, though alarming, had been blown out of proportion by the local media. STDs and HIV awareness programmes are given but the Council expressed the need for more counselling services on HIV/AIDS. This would be required for sufferers, in creating awareness and addressing the health risk behaviour of residents.

5.4.3 Water and Sanitation

Access to safe, clean and reliable drinking water remains a problem on the camp. Apparently, taps were left running continuously, making UNHCR unwilling to foot the bill. Water was thus withdrawn in 1996 (Dick 2000). Since then, refugees have had to rely on water trucks supplying to large storage containers privately owned by some refugees and Ghanaians. These are in turn sold to other residents⁷⁰. Apart from increasing the risk of exploitation in supplying this essential commodity, water quality is difficult to regulate as these containers are either cemented reservoirs or Poly tanks. These are usually difficult to clean so water-borne diseases continue to pose a threat. The poor who cannot afford to buy water have to depend on dirty water from wells and ponds⁷¹ around the camp – a potential source of health hazards. They thus run the risk of catching infections. The so-called purified drinking water is sold in plastic sachets all over the camp. Here again, the poor ones who cannot afford it lose out. But it does serve as a good source of income to some refugees, and a lucrative one at that.

The government has apparently expressed the desire to address the situation⁷² and the UNHCR in collaboration with various partners, has proposed a phased out plan for the introduction of a pump station and a pipe system. Considering how vital water is to life, this will hopefully not remain mere political wishing but will be translated into action.

Fig. 9 A Polytank Container storing water for sale; Fig. 10 A water Tanker supplying water to a storage container; Fig. 11 A UNHCR-built toilet facility in the village; Fig. 12 A section of the “Gulf”



Source: Researcher's own photographs

Source: Mr. J. D. Zon's photograph

With respect to sanitation, the refugees generally maintain their private spaces clean but the same cannot be said of public spaces⁷³. Before UNHCR's withdrawal, refugee volunteers were given allowances to clean the latter but during its absence, the conditions deteriorated. Currently, it has provided a tractor and the Gomoa district has also provided three movable collection trailers. These are manned by volunteers who go around in the morning to collect rubbish from selected vantage points and convey it to a final disposal site.

A Sanitation Board has been set up to manage these affairs while 15 KVIP and Aqua-privy toilet facilities have been provided at various locations⁷⁴. Some however complain of difficulty in accessing these, especially at night, with the poor electricity situation on the camp. Yet others can simply not afford the fee and thus continue to use the gulf or throw black polythene bags used as toilet facilities⁷⁵.

It appears that the sanitation services have not been extended to the village yet so refuse disposal places are lacking and dumping is done indiscriminately. It is not uncommon for people to live right next to improvised dumps which are a real threat. They also imply additional health cost to the already-overstretched budget of the refugees.

The Chairman of the Sanitation Board was of the view that while visitors could easily conclude that the camp is dirty, sanitation is much better now compared to the past. As is usually the case with all ongoing processes however, there is always room for improvement.

5.4.4 Social Welfare and Psycho-Social Services

Since February 2003, the services of a state Social Welfare Officer (SWO) has been engaged to reinforce community service activities. The UNHCR also offers counselling to the refugees both on the camp and in the Accra office. Peer Counsellors and HIV/AIDS Counsellors have also been trained to educate their peers in matters such as contraceptive use, etc. They are also to serve as a link in the hope of encouraging the refugees talk about child and/or spousal abuse cases. They can then be referred to the right organs for assistance. Unfortunately, many of the SGBV counsellors who were trained to handle this important area of concern have not been as vibrant as is required to win the confidence of victims. Some common problems here are defilements, boyfriend/girlfriend assaults and spousal abuse. Even though some officials are likely engaged in exploitation of refugees, all insisted that this is not a problem as it is not reported officially⁷⁶. WISE is however collaborating with the peer counsellors in ensuring that this need is met.

5.4.5 Micro-Finance Projects

According to the UNHCR, refugees in the settlement, in particular women are eligible to participate in micro-finance projects. These, they claim, are designed to enhance self-reliance initiatives and promote gender equality. Some refugees have benefited but indicate that the amounts granted are not substantial enough to encourage its continued patronage. There have also been cases where people have deflected from paying back, thus reducing its sustainability.

5.5 Liberian Refugee Welfare Council (LRWC)

It is the local leadership structure comprised of appointed members of the refugee community. It started out as a small Executive Committee with elected members. It helped the settlement manager cater to needs of fellow Liberians in the early stages and has evolved into what is currently, the LRWC. The current leadership were appointed in August 2003 and continue seeing to the welfare of Liberians in collaboration with the Settlement Manager and other organisations. The latter indicated that the council has always been around and has helped administer the affairs of the camp. The members work full-time on a voluntary basis. The

LRWC-owned water reservoirs, the collection of mail on behalf of the refugees and NGO registration are a few sources of income for the council, though meagre. As already indicated, various sub-committees have been set up to address the welfare needs of the refugees in different areas of their lives. While all of these are important as to the services provided, the activities of a few will be examined to demonstrate ways in which they function.

a) The Women and Children's Affairs Committee: In imitation of the newly created Ghanaian ministry of the same designation, this committee has been created to deal with an important area of concern, women and children's issues. This is particularly relevant as the latter constitute the majority⁷⁷ of the refugee population and often have needs requiring special attention. Whilst seeking the interest of women and children, they set in to resolve issues between the sexes, couples, parents and children, husbands and wives involving children, etc. Teenage girls are of special interest as they often get into hurtful relationships due to lack of support. They offer them counselling and try to get them engaged in projects to encourage self-sufficiency and thus independence. In a recent registration exercise, about 2,670 teenage mothers between the ages of 13-25 were registered⁷⁸, 120 of whom were short-listed for a skill training programme. The US government offered assistance through the Catholic Secretariat as the implementing agency. All indications were that the programme was at a standstill due to some administrative bottlenecks in releasing funds from the agency. Areas of need identified were education; skill training; awareness of violence against women; financial assistance to sustain skills acquired; literacy classes; technical skills in masonry, electricals, building and construction (B & C) and reproductive health education, especially for girls. The need was also expressed for shelters for girls and unaccompanied children:

"Sometimes girls come with a problem and we have to find a home for them but we don't have any such place. We want to have a shelter so when people come with problems we can put them there. Later on after providing counselling, guidance and empowering them in some way, they can be left to go on their own again and leave the place for others who'll come in. We are trying to work on a Shelter Project". (Interview, Co-chair Administration, LRWC)⁷⁹

b) The Arbitration and Disciplinary Committee: It helps relieve the police by handling refugee issues of a non-criminal nature like family, financial matters, debts, etc. It is only when the parties refuse to cooperate or cases are of a criminal nature that the police are involved. This has served as a welcome intervention in addressing minor conflicts before they get out of

hands. It thus helps to maintain the fragile but hard-worn peace so essential to the lives of the refugees.

c) The Health and Sanitation Committee: It is responsible for the general health needs of the refugees. Among others, it helps the vulnerable and seriously sick residents by referring them to the social counsellor for assistance. Usually people pay their own medical bills. But in cases where some are unable to do so, they can, upon recommendation by the council, receive free treatment from the clinic. They assert that being members of the refugee community enables them to identify those who are really in need, especially when these actively seek their assistance. This, in their view, is a way of ensuring that much-needed assistance is channelled to the right recipients, thus minimising over-exploitation of the system.

5.6 NGOs and CBOs

The Liberian refugees' efforts at mobilising themselves to address their needs is well-documented (Dick 2000; UNHCR-Ghana 2003; Zongolowicz 2003). In their displaced state, refugees consider NGOs/CBOs not only as vital tools in helping the vulnerable, but also as an important livelihood means.

According to the Co-chair Administration of the LRWC, there are about 37 local Liberian-initiated NGOs and 15 CBOs operating as women's organisations. Of these, only about 15 and 8, respectively, have recognition from the UNHCR. Apparently, while some are genuine, some have been known to be money-making machines whose promises have just fallen through the roof. Mr. Best, Assistant Coordinator of NGOs (LRWC), suggests that this might be due to lack of proper coordination and registration on their part - something they hope to address in the immediate future. Thus said, many are known to be genuinely striving to help refugees in various areas of need. This is especially the case with the women's organisations, primarily concerned with women and children's issues. Some operate skill training schools to meet the needs of those who cannot afford to be in the mainstream schools and/or are above school-going age but still want to learn. Programmes offered include literacy classes as well as catering, sewing, hair plaiting and so on – all skills that are deemed necessary for the future re-building of Liberia. There is also masonry, B & C, carpentry, tie & dye making, etc. offered to both sexes. I will proceed by highlighting the activities of three such organisations and the areas in which they are helping the Liberians- especially women- meet various needs.

a) *Liberian Refugee Women's Organisation (LIREWO)*: Established in 2000, it is recognised as the first women's CBO to have been established in the camp. Many later followed its steps. It is supported and funded by the UNHCR and the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF). The latter's support is either financial or material. It provides skill training in sewing, baking, hairdressing and tie & dye. According to the Vice President (VP), it caters only to women, aged 16 years or older, as well as orphans. 50 students are enrolled in each programme which runs for 6 months, except for sewing which is 9 months. They pay a token fee of about 20,000 cedis⁸⁰. It also operates a day care centre for its students to enable them concentrate on their studies. The VP asserted that their aim is to help the refugee women become self-sufficient. They thus educated them along these lines and also follow up graduates to ensure that they employ their skills after completion. They hoped to be able to expand their courses to include masonry, carpentry and building construction; areas in which women are said to be lacking.

Fig. 13 LIREWO premises housed at the Women's Centre; Fig. 14 Women training in B and C programme by AGREDS



Source: Researcher's own photographs

They organise clean-ups to help maintain sanitation on the camp. They also work closely together with an implementing NGO to create the criteria for participation in the micro-finance scheme. It is thus charged with screening and interviewing of potential participants (UNHCR-Ghana 2003).

Its efforts have been commended but the need has also been expressed for it to bring its activities under the arm of the Women and Children's Affairs. This is supposedly to encourage effective coordination and streamlining of women and children's issues. It is also to help check the mushrooming of many such institutions, some of which are not authentic.

b) Self-Help Initiative for Sustainable Development (SHIFSD): According to the Head, it is refugee-inspired, non-sectarian NGO legally incorporated in 2001 but officially recognised in 2004. It collaborates with the Black River Project, an American NGO and various local NGOs like GHANET, GRCS, World Vision and The Ghana AIDS Commission (GAC). Its activities involve functional adult literacy education for refugee women, adult education, HIV/AIDS and sexual reproductive health education, child and youth care. It has minor activities in training workshops and counselling services. In the adult education programme, about 150 women are provided with reading, writing and numeracy skills. Many of these have never been to school but are said to be very forthcoming and the motivational force behind their own progress. Volunteers, almost all of whom are Liberians, are also said to be highly motivated. There is also a three-hour programme on Saturdays to help children read. They are looking forward to collaborating with a Danish NGO to help in girl-child education. This is in an effort to help teenage mothers, many of whom have had to drop out of school.

c) Children Better Way (CBW): According to the Executive Director, it is originally a Liberian NGO which established a branch on the camp in 2000. It works in the area of education, health and sanitation with 16 International volunteers. In health, it is working on reproductive health with an emphasis on HIV/AIDS and preventive measures. This is done in schools and on a home to home basis. They are also running a primary and nursery school which they claim to be the lowest paying schools. They are collaborating with R and C, an Italian NGO, to put up a school for the refugees, especially orphans.

The above-mentioned organisations are but a few of the many NGOs and CBOs who are undoubtedly working hard to address refugee problems in various aspects of life. Concerns have however been raised over the mushrooming of all kinds of organisations whose activities leave much to be desired. Sometimes all it takes is the ability to write a good proposal to attract foreign donors who are usually prepared to assist refugees in their self-help efforts. Unfortunately, the funds thus acquired are often misappropriated and end up in the pockets of individuals rather than addressing the needs for which they are meant. There need has thus been expressed for streamlining the existing ones and for accountability on the part of these organisations so as to guard against the exploitation of the weak and needy. This is especially important as it undermines the activities of the genuine ones and the willingness of the refugees to patronise their programmes.

5.7 Conclusion of Institutional Intervention in the lives of Refugees

In the preceding sections, I have endeavoured to present the various organisations involved in the lives of the refugees and to explore ways in which they are acting to enable and/or constrain them. It is obvious that enabling the refugees manage their protracted situation requires all the assistance available in addressing various issues of concern to them. Apparently, most of these institutions act with the aim of addressing welfare concerns of the refugees. They could however be more proactive in supporting these “agents of change” to improve their livelihoods. In spite of the seemingly intractable situation in which they find themselves, the refugees have demonstrated remarkable agency. This resourcefulness demonstrated by the refugees in coping with their situation will be further explored in the proceeding chapter.

Chapter 6: Resignation or Resourcefulness?: Livelihood Strategies as a Means of Coping

Whilst there is no paucity of information on the lived experience of refugees, the need to understand these in terms of the meanings and constructions of the displaced themselves cannot be overemphasised ... Summerfield (1999).

In this study, I have tried to give the refugees a voice to enable comprehension of their perspectives on problems and solutions affecting them⁸¹. This, I have done by endeavouring to present as much of their own narratives as possible, in the light of the objectives that the research seeks to analyse, as well as other relevant issues related to these. In the preceding chapter, I have explored the sort of structures and services available to the refugees in their protracted displacement. The main thrust of my work however, is to present the voices of the refugees as to the choices they make to enable them order their lives and assign it meaning. The subsequent analysis and discussion will thus draw mainly on the accounts and views of five life history respondents interviewed. It will also draw on informal conversations, shadow life history accounts and any other views that provide insight into the issues under discussion. Here, I will consider the livelihood means employed by the refugee women to cope not only in the short-term, but also on a long-term basis. I will also explore their personal security (both tangible and intangible) concerns and touch on some problems affecting camp children. In so doing, I hope to highlight the ways in which they act as “agents of change” within the structures enabling and/or constraining them.

6.1. Coping strategies

“Coping is the manner in which people act within existing resources and range of expectations of a situation to achieve various ends”. Blaikie et al. (1994:62)

The range of actions deployed by refugee women to deal with their protracted situation, differ from one person to the other. They also vary from striving to satisfy basic needs like food, clothing, shelter, to reaching out for goals like empowerment, respect, dignity and preservation of life at both family, household and community level (Skonhofs 1996). They thus go beyond satisfying basic survival needs and plan for the future. Whilst mechanisms employed might not always meet an observer’s definition of the most suitable solution in any particular situation at hand, it is worth noting that individual’s choices are informed by their

experiences, knowledge, capabilities, beliefs and so on. To gain an understanding of the ways in which Liberian refugee women and children have coped with their protracted displacement within the existing range of resources available to them at the camp, I will examine the livelihood strategies employed both to achieve short term survival goals, as well as long terms ones, where possible.

6.2 Livelihood

Refugee livelihood encompass a whole range of issues including basic survival strategies, legal, economic, social, educational, security, health, shelter and other concerns. In considering that of the Liberian refugee women and children, I will focus on some coping mechanisms they have employed in their protracted situation till date, in the light of their livelihood means as well as their security and educational concerns. To enable an understanding of their livelihood situation, I will briefly consider it within the context of their life situation before flight.

6.2.1 Life before flight

An examination of the pre-war livelihood situation of Liberians reveals that a complex interplay of historical, political, cultural, social, economic and religious factors shaped their lives and determined one's access to various opportunities and/or services. These factors have been linked with the Americo-Liberian presence among the indigenous population and the dynamics thereof, the latter having been explained as the major cause of the war in Liberia⁸².

The general consensus among the respondents however was that life in Liberia before the war was "good" or "fine" as expressed in a few comments below:

"I was selling rice (main staple food of Liberians) at the market and it was very profitable. I was not rich but at least I was not waiting for anybody to pay for anything because I was working, I was comfortable, everything was fine". (B. B.⁸³ 23/7/04)

"Sometimes I cry: 'What am I doing here'. You know, before the situation in Liberia, I was trying, I was able to send my children to school, and they were going to good one, the Catholic school...In Liberia when we talk about schools, the Catholic schools are the best and they were going to catholic school. Their tuition was being paid, everything! I was earning a good salary, now here I am, I don't even have 5 cents⁸⁴". (A. A. 2/8/04)

Whilst these sentiments present a somewhat simplified and rather nostalgic view of their life situation in the country of origin prior to the war, they can be appreciated given the present circumstances in which they find themselves. It may well be that these statements reflect a view of their pre-war lives filtered through the experiences of the subsequent war era, rather

than an unequivocal reflection of real events and feelings at the time (see Crush and Miles 1993). However, commenting on the implications of forced displacement on the lives of refugees, especially that of women, Martin (2004:13) asserts: “For most refugee and displaced women, the experience of forced migration requires continuing response to change, including the need to cope with traumatic new circumstances. Forced to leave their “homes” because of persecution and violence, they must often cope with new environments, new language, new social and economic roles, new community structures, new family relationships and new problems”.

The Liberian refugee women are no exception. As a result of the war and its consequences thereof, almost all the respondents I spoke to had lost their husbands and/or child (ren) as well as other family members. They are then saddled with the sole responsibility of caring for whatever family is left, including children disabled by violent rebel action. They are thus experiencing the challenges that come with their changing roles as women within the camp community. This is especially the case as they strive to satisfy not only the basic needs of their family in the short-term, but also carve out a sustainable future for them and the community at large. But “at the same time, refugee women ... generally seek to reconstruct familiar lifestyles as much as physically and socially possible” (ibid. 2004:13).

The sustained portrayal of refugees has been one of helpless victims pouring across international borders in desperate need of assistance on which they are dependent for their very existence. While this is true to a certain extent, it perpetuates what has been referred to as the “myth of dependence” (Kibreab 1993; Dick 2002). Several studies have criticized the ways in which refugees are assigned an image of the “eternal victim”, forever dependent on whatever aid or assistance made available to them (Harrell-Bond 1986; Malkki 1996; Goodwin-Gill 1999). The overwhelming evidence however points to the fact that more than being helpless, passive victims, refugees are agents of change. They thus take advantage of the situations they are presented with in their new environment, even if somewhat constrained by these. In a sense then, refugee women are both agents of change and sources of tradition and continuity (Martin 2004).

Many find it impossible to imagine that it would be possible to lead any life, much more anything close to normal, in the situation in which the refugees find themselves. As it is, displacement is in itself bad enough, without the suspended limbo that protractedness seems

to add to the situation. Resignation for some then is a justifiable course of action with respect to the refugees. In the course of the research however, it was observed that individuals do and have actively employed a wide range of strategies to date. This is done not only to survive, but as a means to order their lives and give it as much meaning as their circumstances allow. These vary from a strong reliance on remittances from family and friends abroad to mutual assistance; active involvement in church activities; voluntary work; petty trading in the market, on the broad street, in front of houses, in street corners; numerous NGO/CBOs, mostly Liberian-run, involved in various areas of camp life; dependence on relationships and/or multiple partners and prostitution to mention a few. I will explore some of these measures employed and the ways in which they help the refugees manage their situation.

6.2.2 Remittances

Increasingly, much of the literature on refugee studies focus on the importance of remittances to the survival of refugees. The implementation of UNHCR's solution of resettlement has enabled some among the refugee populations to go to western countries and have led to an active remittance phenomenon among refugee populations. It has been observed that remittances provided by refugees, resettled in and residing in these third countries of asylum, to kin in areas of Africa, have become an important source of support in the overall income essential to meeting their daily subsistence and critical needs (Riak Akuei 2004; Sperl 2001).

Liberians have had a long history of association with the US, especially among the Americo-Liberians (Congos), but resettlement is making it increasingly possible for people to have access to at least a kin or friend in the US or other western countries sending down remittances. A respondent sums it up thus:

“My mother sent me small money and the man in the US, who is interested in me, also helped to enable me buy a house in Area U. He has been the one supporting me mostly...I have to wait for somebody to call me to tell me that “Oh I'm sending you some money” (A. A.)

The importance of remittances cannot be overemphasized. Obviously, they do more than satisfy subsistence and other needs but have a spill over effect on the entire camp community. It is one of the main sources of capital for the many shops and businesses that have sprung up all over the camp. It also accounts for the thriving call centres and mobile phone business from which calls are made or received at a fee. Commenting on how remittances fuel the camp economy, a respondent explained:

“Besides that, there are a few of us who receive assistance from our relatives abroad. So if you have your relatives abroad who sent you something, I come to you and say: ‘Please borrow me \$25-50 and let me establish my little thing, I’ll pay you back’. That’s how all these shops are run. You see, people doing little shoe repairs, making slippers, sewing and all that, this is how it’s working”. (P. C. 16/7/04)

As important as it is, its frequency can be rather sporadic in some cases, making it difficult to rely solely on that. Related to this is the “donor fatigue” on the part of resettled ones who are often overwhelmed and overburdened by the numerous demands for support from all quarters⁸⁵. A respondent relates:

“Only my twin sister is in the US. Hmm, for almost three years now she hasn’t sent me anything. Maybe she herself, she has problems that I don’t know about”. (C. M. 26/7/04)

While the general impression seems to be that many are receiving these remittances, the actual picture suggests that not many have people abroad on whom to depend directly, as indicated by these comments:

“There are a few of us who receive assistance from our relatives abroad. I won’t say the majority, but some that you see receive, I don’t know what percentage”. (P. C.)
“If I tell you since I enter here, I never even enter there (Western Union)⁸⁶, you’ll not believe it. So I will not say this place is good for me. I never gotten family abroad or anything. Some people its fine with them, but some of us, it’s not really fine”. (B. B.)

For these then, it is very necessary to supplement whatever little they receive or even rely completely on other livelihood means.

6.2.3 Mutual Assistance and Active Church Involvement

Speaking of livelihood strategies for Mozambican refugees in South Africa, Golooba-Mutebi and Tollman (2004) observe: “Mutual aid characterizes the lives of refugees the world over as goods and services are regularly exchanged this way.” Liberian refugees in Ghana are no exception. In fact there is a strong reliance on help from friends and well-wishers. Talking about how they manage, respondents note:

“When you see your friend, like you here now, and I want to sell water. I don’t have money, I see you, I come and explain my problem to you: ‘please help me with small something’, I will not waste it. I will take a bit and put it aside to sell something small because tomorrow is coming and I will not see you again to say please help me. So we believe that when they give you something, you should make good use of it”. (C. M.)
“It can’t be easy, so what I can do, I get some friends in the market, one of my friends give me this, the other one supply me that, that one too give me small. That’s how I manage”. (B. B.)

This also seems to be intrinsically linked with the “help of God” and/or active involvement in church activities. The latter seems to be of prime importance to an overwhelming majority of refugees⁸⁷. Dick (2002:56) observes that Liberian involvement in church is a ubiquitous feature of camp life, stating: “needing to re-orient their lives in exile around something familiar and powerful, many Liberians look through the lens of Christianity to see the world and to interpret their experiences”.⁸⁸ There are a variety of reasons for this active interest in church but as these views indicate, it seems to be an important source of livelihood and for others, a means of relaxation from the stresses of camp life:

“Then again I have been active in church, serving as the Chair on the Catholic School (St. Gregory School) Board where 2 of my children are; and I was given some small compensation as well as occasional gifts from some of my church members with which I was able to do something for myself, we manage with that. I am now the President for the Parish Advisory Board and also belong to a fraternal organisation here- the Ladies of Marshall- and sometimes my fraternal sisters in Accra who know me assist us....and that's how we're making it” (A. A.)

“Religion plays a very important role in my life. It has really helped me in my life. I believe everything is by the Grace of God. So if there's something that really worry me and I decide I'll turn my face upside down to God and I say: “today I'll wrestle with God for what I want until he give me”, it can happen. Like sometime if I am out of money... like today, I got up I didn't even have 5 cents⁸⁹ for me and my children to eat. I pray, I say, God you'll not let my children die of hunger today. So I tell him, I say: “I'm going out but I want for you to make way for my children and me to eat today”. Soon as I enter the camp, somebody say: “heh, I haven't seen you for a long time” and they gave me 20,000 cedis”. I went running back to my children and gave it to them saying that it's God that did it for us. (C. M.)

“Yeah, I like church, it is important to me. That one self, it makes me relax, it make me forget about my problems. You know the scripture when they read it to you and you hear it, it makes you fine” (B. B.)

Apparently, the church business is a flourishing one with churches constantly springing up. Whilst it is claimed not to be for commercial purposes, the age-old argument stands: “The worker is worthy of his wages”. Thus most church leaders feel justified in depending on church proceeds as a livelihood means, in exchange of which they also dedicate their time to see to the “spiritual” needs of the people. As one church leader put it:

“I'm one of the elders in my church. That's how I manage, you know, the activities of the church. I'm at the church office all day because I don't like to sit idle. I must find something to do - which is mostly church work now”. (Name Withheld)

These needs seem to span a wide array of services including regular prayers for resettlement opportunities. Since this matter is so dear to the heart of many, it is a service that is well-patronised as people actively seek the blessings of the so-called men of God. Collections are

of course an important part of the whole process. Some who have been “blessed” enough to make it abroad, might also keep the contact and send down relief items to be administered by their church. Whilst some might be genuine in their endeavours, others have been known to exploit and/or defraud the people. Church-organised relief thus appears to be an important source of assistance though its frequency and reliability have been questioned in some cases. This is especially so where it has not reached those to whom it was destined:

“Once in a while we have some church members abroad that sends clothes but for them to send money is difficult”. (C. M.)

“I like the church but just the behaviour. You know, our members in America, they send money for those who don’t have people in America so they will do business with it. But they eat the money and don’t give us. So those who know book (the educated), they wrote to those in America about the pastor and now they stopped giving everything; food, money and all” (C. P.)

That said, there are a number of church organisations offering various services, notable among which is AHEAD. They offer various courses in secretarial and skills training. A lot of the UNHCR-implementing partners are also church-related like the Catholic Relief Agency, AGREDS, etc. and they also offer assistance in various sectors of camp life. Whilst these help in different ways to supplement the needs of the refugees or provide needed services and training programmes, there are more proactive ways in which the refugees act to ensure survival and even acquire skills for future use.

6.2.4 Voluntary work

A profile of the refugee population indicates that it is a heterogeneous one with people from all walks of life with varying skills and socio-economic backgrounds. Though the UNHCR offers to help with the necessary recommendation in the case of employment on the job market, jobs are almost impossible to find in HIPC-Ghana with its struggling economy and high unemployment, even for the locals. Most employees also have a negative attitude towards the refugees and often refuse them jobs under the pretext of their not possessing refugee status or not having the necessary documentation to support their claims. Whilst few have been able to penetrate the market, the majority of skilled ones have had to find alternative ways of managing. They thus draw on past and present skills to render voluntary services to their fellows, either for free or for a little compensation and in order to keep busy. Some respondents engaged in various forms of voluntary work explained;

“I had been sitting at home doing nothing when the Chairman invited me in to be part of his administration after his appointment; and because my resettlement programme was not successful I said: ‘let me just go to take away the trauma’, that’s how I came

to work here. I have been in administration for a long time so I have knowledge to run this office and to do work. It's just unfortunate we are not being paid because if we were, then I would have gotten myself a job, because this is a full-time job. We come here by 8am and we leave from here 4-5pm, so we are working. It's just that it is a voluntary work so we are not being paid for it. It's important too to have pay but at the same time given our own situation here, it's important to be doing something... so I'm happy that I have the opportunity to be here. I'm not sitting at home worrying and brooding over my situation. I'm able to come here and meet other people, laugh and talk, help other people solve their problems, share other problems with other people whose situation are even a bit worse than mine, I can talk to them. So I find it comforting to be here, that I am able to do something to serve my people". (A. A.)

"I'm a volunteer working with the disabled under the UN. Like here now, I'm doing volunteer work for the Orientation. Here, I volunteering myself to come. So you see, I find it's very good for me because, me, I don't like sitting at one place, I always like to be around. Whether I'm getting paid or not, I must do something, that's my belief. So what I'm doing here I find it very good. You know, like before, Mr. William⁹⁰ came, he told me to work so he'll give me something but now, I believe that its for my people, I must do something for my people. I'm not being paid, it's voluntary but whether I get paid or not, I'm very busy". (C. M.)

Though they are not being paid as they would in a regular job, it serves a useful purpose of keeping them busy. It thus banishes the corrosive influence of idleness that can be so detrimental in a protracted situation like theirs. It also gives them further skills and an exposure that promotes a sense of usefulness, dignity and satisfaction in being able to help others in need. Doubtlessly, it enables them to cope. The contacts built and the recognition gained as one carries out their duty can also be beneficial and promote a sense of accomplishment even if honorary. This is how an ex-leader of the LRWC expressed it:

"I've also been exposed to an extent, I have met people. I think that's some benefit. Not too long ago, I was coming out of my house and Mr. T. Albrecht, the UNHCR representative, was coming from the office with some people in the car. He reversed and stopped by me. He introduced me to them as the former chairman of the council. I think that's some recognition. I go to Ghana Immigration Services, the Director there, you know I can pass freely, the police, etc. sometimes when something happen and somebody is in trouble, I go there. I can pass, you know, that's some recognition.

6.2.5 Micro-economic Activities

Much has been said about the success of the camp owing to the many businesses and petty trading activities to be observed all over. As already indicated, some of these thriving businesses are fuelled by remittances and others, owned by Ghanaian entrepreneurs. However, trading, whether on a large or small scale, is another important means by which women care for their many responsibilities. Some youths also assist their mothers in these activities or trade on their own to supplement their income. Whilst the exact figures are hard to come by, the majority of the over 70%⁹¹ Liberians selling in the two markets on the camp

are women. There are numerous other shops, bars/restaurants, kiosks, tables, stocked with provisions and all sorts of food and non-food items, lining the streets, in front of houses, at the night market⁹² and so on. Others sell Liberian-baked pastries, roasted corn, food and anything that will bring in some income.

Fig. 15 Refugee mother with child on back frying plantain chips for sale; Fig. 16 Refugee mother selling hot meals in front of her house; Fig. 17 Mother selling roasted corn and iced water for a living



Source: Researcher's own photographs

Source: Mr. Cornell (Snr.)'s photograph

Fig. 18 Women trading at one of the two markets on the camp; Fig 19 Single Mother selling Drinks for a living; Fig. 20 Livelihood Means: Multi-item shop on the camp



Source: Researcher's and Mr. Zon's Photographs

Regular trips are also taken to and from Kasoa where a market with much cheaper goods is located. Hair plaiting is another important source of income with services provided to Liberians and Ghanaians alike. Some women talk about the various trading activities they have been engaged in to enable them care for their family:

“Most of the time I go to Accra and come. I also went to Nigeria in 2001 to buy some things from there. I was selling mineral water whole sale⁹³ and I used to cook Rice with Cassava leaves and sell. I'm still selling my little water”. (C. M.)

“I started with gari⁹⁴. I used to go Kasoa, I buy it and then I carry around for rice. If I give you 1 cup of gari, then you give me 1 cup of rice. I start the business 1991. I myself, I built the shop as an extension of the house so they not taking money for it. Now I selling soft drinks, beer and stuff. Even 1994/95, some kind of people were giving money for loan and they gave us money at the Women's Centre. I was one of those that took that money and I know that I was one of those that was able to pay back. I make much profit. I make profit ooh, that one I can't lie to you. It was very good for me”. (B. B.)

The list of activities is inexhaustible. In doing all these, women display ingenuity, industriousness and agency in circumventing various constraints. In so doing, they manage to turn around what would otherwise be a dismal situation. The desire to be engaged in something however, has led to a “choked” market due to an influx of people trading. Whilst this promotes competition which can be healthy, it also leads to low sales and returns for individual traders. BB, a single mother and head of household, enumerates some challenges faced in her trading activities on which her whole family depends:

“I used to sell food but this time, I don’t know, the camp getting quiet, so I afraid to cook the food. When it can’t finish then I’ll loose. First they used to buy but now they can’t buy because many people are selling. Food and drink can bring you money on this camp, to tell the truth. But I don’t know the camp is getting cold. So even if I sell something else, I think that problem will still be here. Because I get good start, it even carry me to the extent that the other day, I say I want to sell the place and sit down here in the house because I was not happy with the rate of business’. (B. B)

These views are not unique to her. Yet, inspite of the apparent discouragement with the slow rate of business, many still keep at it. They thus manage to make ends meet in providing sustenance for survival. From small beginnings, some have even been able to establish long-term ventures with the help of micro-finance assistance and through other means. It is well-documented that even during UNHCR’s 2-year complete withdrawal when all forms of assistance were stopped, the refugees did not give up in exasperated resignation. Whilst they would not wish it to happen again, they did all they could to manage the situation at hand. They thus make it on their own inspite of the apparent difficulties involved in doing so from day to day. A respondent says of this period:

‘Ah, we were just trying on our own by making our garden, selling water, food, some selling used clothes, just name it. Some opened shops or restaurants, just by the grace of God. So during that time we were trying, we were really trying. It was really difficult but as I said, by the Grace of God, we made it’. (C. M.)

It has been suggested that refugees deploy assistance or food rations, where relevant, to match their needs and priorities. Thus more than being negative and creating dependency, food aid can rather become an integral part of the multiple resources that people actively generate to create livelihoods (See Kibreab 1993, Zetter 1999, Brun 2003). This is prominently illustrated in B. B.’s account where she relates that her means of survival from the beginning was by exchanging ration provisions for other commodities and eventually for money. Whilst using the structures to serve her needs, her skills as a business woman were no doubt brought to bear on the success she had in this area. As she puts it:

'I know that if I get 50 cedis, in 3 months time, I can turn that to 100,000 cedis. If that's 100 cedis, I can turn it to 200,000 cedis. That one that my area I know, so I can't lie to anybody say when your skirt tear I can sew it, that one I just lying. But for business, that one I know it. After I get the money from 1994, I used to go round. I buy supply from people, the food they giving us, but I was not going to buy the physical thing. I'll come to you and say: 'oh, I get money here'. If you want money, then you give me your supply card, because they give us card. When you give it to me, maybe I use it 1 month, 2month, 3month and maybe that only one person food. You say: 'ok only my rice you take but not my sardine, oil, etc. and after you finish you bring my thing to me'. So I will take it for 3 months, after that I'll carry the money, be that 10,000 or 30,000 cedis, then we make paper, I find someone to make for me. Then I go to this one, I do the same, like that. If they supply, then I myself go there, I collect the food. So instead of them to open this and open that, all the different thing, I'll just put together and maybe I get one or two bags, you see. Then you come for your oil, tomato and sardines. So I put that one together and carry it to the market. Sometimes I go Markola⁹⁵ me myself I put my tent, I sell it around. That how I was doing until I start pure water business, then I say I will do (sell) soft drink. It's not easy but that just how I make it'. (B. B)

In spite of all the efforts, it must be acknowledged that there are formidable challenges faced by these in struggling to meet basic needs. Whilst many will strive by all means possible to use decent strategies to survive, not all do. B. B. adds:

'So for 3 days now, you can remember, the time you give me camera, you see I was behind there. I was cooking Palm Bator (butter) soup for use for 6 days. I can't make it thick because if I sell, I make 40,000 cedis and I take food money from there, so how much will be left? So if I get palm nut from Kasoa, I cook that one Olonka⁹⁶. I buy fish about 2000 cedis, I put it inside. I make sure I warm the soup. It'll help me, that six days I don't buy but I'll sell more than 100,000 cedis. You see, so sometimes because of the poor buying now, you have to be drained. Like yesterday, I boil beans, we just take some rice with it. If we say we want to make different, different stew, then I think that problem will come'. (B. B.)

Not all are willing, however, to cut down expenses or work as hard to care for their needs. These rely on what has been termed negative or harmful coping mechanisms, like dependence on multiple sexual partners, prostitution and the like, to eke out a living. In order to explore this further, I will consider it in the context of the security concerns of women and the youth; the ways in which their protracted situation is enabling or constraining them in this area, as well as the ways in which they are dealing with this. I will also touch on the life of the "camp children" and the coping mechanisms they are employing.

6.3 Personal security

“The personal security of refugees...living in camps is an essential element of international protection. Unless fundamental rights of camp residents as human beings- to life, liberty and security to person- are safeguarded, other rights and benefits... are of little use”. CMt (2004:156).

Obviously, security is a most basic but vital human need. This is especially the case in a refugee camp setting where people have usually experienced untold sufferings and often serious breaches to their security. In this section, I will consider refugee’s perceptions of their livelihood security drawing on a typology employed by a refugee woman and loosely corresponding to Physical safety and Intangible security or vulnerability respectively⁹⁷.

6.3.1 Physical Safety

As indicated in the above quote, the right to life and security to person is basic for all persons, including camp residents. It may even be especially important for them, particularly women and girls, given their history of flight from violence and conflicts in which violations to life and person are routine. After international boundaries are crossed, camps are usually supposed to be a refuge away from violence but that is hardly ever the case. Crime, assaults, armed robberies, child abductions and rape have all been very characteristic of life on the camp. No wonder it has been called “a hotbed of crime”. Many attested to this fact:

“I can’t remember the month again as I say, but in the night, certain time when you say, it’s hot, you open your room. Before you know, somebody will just chuck (stab) you. Like one lady, she was attacked in the night in her house. She felt a shadow at her window and wanted to find out who it was; they just chopped off her hand”. (B. B.)

“Prior to the establishment of the NWT, it was very unsafe for us as people were passing objects through windows to chuck others. There were also issues of rape, sometimes in people’s homes and thefts were rampant”. (M. M.)

“Before, a lot of chucking and things were going on. People used to go around chucking with knives, no one was safe. Like before, every morning you hear: ‘they now cut this man hand, they stabbed this one on the face, they stabbed this one in the stomach oo’. You sleep, every 5 minutes, you have to jump up because you’re your own security”. (C. M.)

“There came a time when there used to be a series of incidents with security here which resulted in the March 24 2001 incident where the police had to come on the camp”. (P. C.)

The general consensus among all however was that with the introduction of the NWT, the security situation had greatly improved. They thus felt much safer and expressed confidence in its effectiveness at addressing their personal safety needs. This apparently contributed to

their preference to remain on the camp over going back to an unsafe Liberia. Most were full of praises for their efforts as indicated by the remarks of a number of respondents:

“At least security is ok now, with the NWT patrolling every night in the area. Each zone has a unit and anytime in the night they’re all around. even my own area, every night I hear them passing, even right in my yard some of them live there so the security is ok now, unlike when I came before it was bad, but now it’s ok”. (A. A.)

“So since the NWT come in now, by the grace of God, we don’t hear that thing no more. They’re doing well because now my window can be opened till the next day, only this time the weather cool but when it is hot, I can leave it open. Rape used to happen but because of the NWT, all that thing going down”. (B. B.)

“Since February 2001 when they brought in the NWT, things have really improved and now all crime has reduced considerably. As at now, there are safety measures in place so for example if you go to the Café or anywhere on the camp and you’re late, you can be given a chit to show to a NWT member on duty who’ll convey you home. I think this is not a curfew but a safeguard and security check”. (M. M.)

Whilst most admitted that, generally, there could always be room for improvement, they were reluctant to admit to any real or perceived faults on the part of the NWT. All complaints were dismissed as rumours as people had not come forward to report specific misdemeanours involving its members. The head of the Team also indicated that disciplinary action was also taken against “bad nuts” if such were detected. This coupled with the vetting of the members seemed to be serving as an effective check. This respondent’s response as to whether the NWT can be trusted, sums it all up:

“One thing about people, they talk without evidence. If you say you caught the NWT member stealing, bring him forward. I have not heard any case, apart from this talking. I know for sure that they’ll have their faults, but to some extent, they’re trying to keep the security in place. One or two might have fallen by the wayside and might have done something but for their efforts, we see we have been sleeping”. (P. C.)

Other concern had to do with the perceived presence of some harmful elements in the camp.

The ex-leader of the LRWC had this to say about possible subversive activities in the camp:

“Are there some rebels/activists in the camp then?: Yeah, this question has been asked me before. I’ve been out of that place for a long time but I know with so many people and so many factions here, there could be many ex-rebels here. People talk about them and they know that. I don’t know whether they’re active or not but I know with the number of people that have come here, especially the latter groups⁹⁸ ... I can’t identify the person when he’s passing, I don’t know them really that close but I’m sure that with some people coming from home, such ones will be here. There are other people that maybe had an issue back home and have met here, somebody chasing another from home. All these things here cause a lot of riots because in this camp, there is no way that you can identify or separate people. Everybody’s just together so if you saw your torturer from back home and you met him here, I mean it’s a problem”. (Interview, Ex-chairman of LRWC)

In line with the above fears, the Ghanaian Government carries out occasional raids as a security check. This was also a great source of concern to the refugees. Most indicated that the presence of the military in full uniform on the camp at such times was very disturbing. This was especially the case as they had already been traumatised from war and were thus weary of such sights⁹⁹. On the whole, however, the refugees felt they were relatively safe physically with some even expressing gratitude for the provision of security in the camp. The same could however not be said about the intangible security needs of women and the youth on the camp.

6.3.2 Vulnerability

In the course of the research, various factors were cited as contributing to their vulnerability. Prominent among these was the difficult living conditions coupled with the lack of jobs. This was revealed to be especially problematic for the women who are now saddled with single-handedly caring for their families and dependants. A respondent observed:

“You see, when you come to the women and children in a refugee setting, they have problems. This is an abnormal situation and most of the women have lost their husbands as well as some children. Where there is no husband, no job and income, then it’s a serious problem. Most of the things that happen with certain people, a man leaves a woman and never comes back. This happens a lot but people keep them without exposing them”. (P. C.)

Implicit in this is the unreliableness of relationships formed as a means of providing a safety net. Apparently, this resulted in dependence on and/or abusive relationships as a means of coping. Such was particularly said to be the case with women who relied solely on men in catering to their needs and that of their children. Abuses in such cases were observed to be rampant and it was not uncommon for women to be kicked out of their homes on the slightest whim. An official of the LRWC’s views on this were also confirmed by a respondent as expressed below:

“Women are at risk here in the sense that it is not everybody who has someone to give them something. So if they don’t have anybody, maybe they’ll try and do other things. Maybe they will try and make some marketing but it’s like from hand to mouth, so they get into relationships. Maybe in this relationship, the person you’re with is the one who has a relative in the states and bringing the support, so they’ll just use you and beat you. We always handle cases like that here. People come together in a relationship, they build a house and maybe it is the man whose family is sending the money. At the end of the day he gets tired with the woman. Maybe they have 2 or 3 children, he beats her up and they come here for support, they want to judge who owns the house and all that. At the end of the day when you get into it, it’s the man’s brother who sent them money to build the house, you know. So like that, then women are not secure here, they are not secure”. (Interview, LRWC Female official)

“Yeah, a lot of them do¹⁰⁰, that’s why we learnt about equal rights. Now men getting to know that women got rights just like them too. It’s not because you’re giving me everything or you have your family abroad and here I don’t have anyone sending me anything. and because from your family you stretch hand to me so you have to abuse me. So they telling them woman is not a ball. Men used to abuse women but they invited a few of them to workshops to get to know women rights. If she’s making the market, you do not expect her to come back to cook and clean up after that. They should help the women in the home and some of them are really doing it now”. (C. M.)

Some were positive that such educational campaigns were reaching the men and gradually changing their attitude. Hopefully, these are achieving the desired results. Abuses were however cited as one of the most common cases of GBV. Whilst acknowledging that the lack of employment of women was a significant contributory factor, some officials of WISE indicated they would rather attribute it to the cultural beliefs and practises that considered men as superior to women¹⁰¹. They even asserted that some women had a mentality that being beaten was a sure sign of being loved by their men¹⁰². Particularly disturbing was the reluctance to admit to the presence of SGBV on the part of persons in authority. There appeared to be a unified stance among the officials on SGBV perpetuated by “protectors” in exchange for various services. In cases where it was acknowledged, the blame was squarely placed on the shoulders of the victims as having solicited for it. Infact the UNHCR was so convinced of the efficacy of what it called its “strict” code of conduct that, it considered this almost an impossible scenario. This it explained was especially so as most of its staff were female anyway and/or had worked long enough to know what and what not to do. Below is a sampling of such views:

“SGBV was a case in Kenya and other places, not in Ghana. UNHCR-Ghana especially has a strict code of conduct. Besides, many have worked here long enough to know what and what not is allowed. The majority of staff are women anyway. There are also no reports to the authorities on the camp engaged in exchanging sex for AID. There are rather more incidents of fraud by some members of management but those reports are not even substantiated.” (Interview, UNHCR-Ghana)

“GBV is a problem but not on a large scale. It is mostly husbands beating wives, boyfriends beating girlfriends, etc. In every society, you find people going against the norms and the same is true of us. There are no reported cases of people in authority abusing girls for sexual favours and even if it exists, it has not been brought to our knowledge. UNHCR and WISE are trying to come in to educate on such matters”. (Name Withheld, Interview, LRWC Female Official)

“Most reports are officials loving to some but they are unconfirmed. Girls attach themselves to big people because they want something. Liberian ladies are mostly aware of what they are doing and if they are doing something, it is willing”. (Name Withheld, Interview, LRWC Female Official supposedly dealing with Women and Children)

“Some of the officials abuse their position but it is an open secret. However, not all capitalise on their position. I also think the women also entice them to satisfy their needs. They are thus reluctant to report. It’s like they willingly go forward though forced by circumstances. They will only be dumped as officials usually have wives. I think it might be due to the trauma of their refugee situation but it is too embarrassing for the women to be subjected to this just because of their situation. With enough education on the rights of refugees, women might feel confident to report such incidents”. (Name Withheld, Interview, Camp Management official)

Apparently, whilst a few reluctantly admitted that this was a possibility, there generally seems to be a wishing away of the problem on the part of the officials. Something I find very unfortunate. In fact one person’s actions are enough to cause untold damage and yet there is more than one male staff anyway amidst the numerous female officers¹⁰³. This increases the likelihood of SGBV happening, especially in the 15 years of displacement in which they find themselves. Whilst they may have been striving to cope, it is no secret that they have to grapple with remarkable constraints that might just expose some to such a kind of exploitation. Experience has indeed shown that unconfirmed reports are not at all an indication of the absence of such. Indeed the facts have shown that, very often, such practices are not reported. Rather than indicating absence, this could point to the lack of effective mechanisms for reporting and protecting victims from further harassment (See Naik 2002)¹⁰⁴. Indeed admitting that the SGBV group is really not functioning now¹⁰⁵ is in itself serious cause for concern. Though it is claimed that most of its members put up their names for the benefits they anticipated getting and not to work; the example of some dedicated members of the same group and the peer counsellors indicates that there are yet others who will be more than willing to assist when given the appropriate training. It is noteworthy that almost all the officials do see the need for some form of education or the other. Whilst efforts are being made to address this issue on the camp, it would have to be stepped up considerably if any progress is to be made in this vital area and in protecting victims. All said, I trust that these issues have been accorded serious attention in the period following this research.

Unfortunately much prominence has not been given to the voice of the refugees on this issue not because there was none but because most were not comfortable enough to talk openly about it. There is however no lack of rumours on the camp as the existence of this practice. Infact through informal conversations some pointed to the fact that some officials are implicated. In response to one of the official’s denying statements above, a refugee countered:

“Don’t mind him! Some of them really like girl matter and are as guilty as anything. Eh they loving to the girls? How you think many getting through the interviews, ain’t it

through their backsides? Even some Ghanaian girls doing it! Many flocking to the mansion and out, what you think they going do in there?" (Name Withheld, Refugee lady)

Actually, an official's name consistently came up as being particularly corrupt in using his position/duties as a bait and excuse for demanding sexual favours and promoting irregular practices connected to his job¹⁰⁶. Regrettably, I am rather restrained in the extent to which I can rely on this data that can be said to be unempirical as it has to do with rumours and indirect statements. By stating it however, I hope to demonstrate that such practices are not as absent as one would have us believe. Some refugees also noted that whilst the majority of women were conscientious in caring for their responsibilities, others were simply lazy. A respondent noted:

"Of course there are some lazy people who are just like that. Some of them they have their parents even in the States and they will still go on the streets. Some of them they have their parents here willing to do everything for them and they still go, they don't want to do anything, they don't want to work". (A. A.)

In line with this, the issue of prostitution as a means of coping also came up. The refugees seemed to have mixed feelings about this sensitive issue especially as it has been a bone of contention between them and some Ghanaians. Whilst some acknowledged it as a problem, others were more reluctant to do so. Most were torn between different views with some even arguing that the situation called for it. Others also ascribed it to the actions of a few bad nuts who can be found in any given society, and especially a traumatised one like theirs. Below are some of the varied opinions expressed:

"When the security came to carry out operations on the camp, I was chairman of the council at that time. The manager called me and told me one of the reason why was that, our girls are doing prostitution. So one thing I told him was: 'well, under normal conditions, they still got prostitution! So if people who have problems are doing it, you know, we don't condone it but we should know why it is so'. I guess few of them are doing prostitution and all of those kinds of things. But for me, where I sit, I will not know who is out there and who's not. But I won't be surprised if they're doing it". (Interview, Ex-Chairman of LRWC)

"It's not true that there's prostitution on the 18, but the way the person behave, woman, they say your body is your crown. If you making yourself like everybody should come for you, that the thing¹⁰⁷. It's not like they doing that, going to hotel and getting money, it not like that. But the way they make their dressing like that, it makes people say they go to 18 for ashawo¹⁰⁸ business. Me I don't see any there before. You know sometimes some Liberians have friends in Accra who have cars. They come here and several friends join them in the car, they leave. That what somebody sees, they say they're ashawo. But sometimes it can't really be like that. Even though I can't be there but I don't see somebody and tell what is in their heart, until they can tell me. But

sometime, it'll be true but me I don't see it. Like that, if I can see it happening, then yes, I will agree". (B. B.)

"Here we are, we are not working! It's not every woman, who has this strong resolve to say: "I'm not going to let any man tamper with me, give me money, or go and sell myself for money. There are some people who do not have the strong resistance to hardship. If it comes to that, they cannot stand the tension, they can go and do other things that are not ok. If you go to Accra, I'm sure some of our girls are there and even some women are involved in that. Some of them go under the disguise of plaiting hair and other things but they come back pregnant. Where did they get these pregnancies from? - Not from the camp. Even some people here with their boyfriends, their husbands, they leave because these are not working. They go they say they are going to plait hair in Tema and they stay there for months, when they know they're not sufficient in the home. In a few months' time, their lifestyle, their everything changes; and you can't tell me that plaiting hair, when they give 2000 or 3000 cedis, can transform your life like that! So it's like undercover this other things are being done, you know". (A. A.)

6.4 Camp Children

"A refugee's life, regardless of age, is never an easy one. But for many reasons, exile is particularly hard on the young. In addition to the usual emotional strains associated with coming of age, young refugees must often confront the torments of war, violence, bereavement, sexual abuse... At an age when they should be dreaming of life's limitless possibilities and building up their skills in preparation for adulthood, they are instead bound by the harsh reality of poverty and displacement, and condemned to what often seems to be a life without hope – Message of Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General (World Refugee Day 2003)

A particularly recurrent theme was the life of the youth or so-called “camp children” and the ways in which they were coping. Rather disturbing was the “child born child” concept¹⁰⁹.

Here is what some respondents had to say about it:

“That one it's hard to talk because for the same hardship, you see somebody 12 years, she pregnant. If you go to the clinic, you can't see anybody in your age pregnant now, everybody that 12 or 13 years; because of the same hard time. The person want food to eat, something to wear, they'll go lie behind somebody, maybe he'll give them 5000 cedis, that's why they go to the person. No, they're not safe, because you yourself you can't be baby and you go born baby? I don't really know why they keep borning because every time they born, the problem increases. First when you were yourself, you only take care of yourself but now you born baby. You have to get double everything for yourself and baby. So at the end of the day, you can't afford that money, so you go and lay with another man. Before you come to your senses, different one comes again. Not to say they do it intentional, you know the problem. Because no one will intentionally say I see hard time so I'll go born”. (B. B.)

“Yeah, right now inside here even if you go to our clinic, you'll see those children - 14/15- year girls having babies. It's an ugly life situation here to tell you the truth. In the past it was really not as it is now, it's really rampant! You see, Liberian society has been disrupted by the rebel activity since the war. It disrupted the family life and

all that. This is almost 15 years, so it's been over a long period of time. It's not surprising". (P. C.)

"Lots of 'babies' borning babies on the camp now. Like few months ago, one of the little babies got pregnant. She went to take it out and she died". (CM)

The issue here is not the age at which one chooses to give birth. But given the circumstances they find themselves in, what sort of future prospects is open to these youths and their babies? In caring for the latter, the same limited resources have to be stretched taught. Actually there were cases of children being dumped or offered for sale because their young, single unemployed mothers could not afford to care for them any longer¹¹⁰. Added to this is danger of unauthorised abortions and the threat of HIV/AIDS. A LRWC official made these assertions about the youth:

"Due to lack of support, a lot of girls, especially the unaccompanied ones, get into all sorts of things. Some of the girls are aborting using perm relaxer and they are dying. Most AIDS cases at the clinic are young people". (Interview, Co-chairperson Administration, LRWC, 5/7/04)

Single parents appeared to be especially affected. The lack of jobs and/or meagre incomes they earned was hardly enough to care for the household. Added to this was the pressure on the youth to conform to their peers. Some of these were apparently left on their own with money to spend but little supervision. Maintaining parental discipline seemed to be particularly challenging. Several single parents complained thus about the situation:

"It's difficult to control them. My 3rd son, run away. When things getting hard maybe the person want to make their self like other people passing by, they're like this, they're like that. You too you want to put pressure when you are not ready. So sometimes, he takes things, like the sale money. So sometimes I myself, I take him to the police, they'll beat him - I say they should beat him! Because I don't have, we're managing to find just something to eat and I put it down, because you want to use the money to buy bad things, you take it? So I told them, they beat him, then he get vexed so he leave the house. Since 1 year now, he never tell me where he gone to. Even when he was here and he does something I want to discipline him in here, he stands on the bed, you know, he's tall, he want to beat me". (B. B.)

"Since we entered here through war, if my child want me to buy her a dress and I cannot afford money to buy it for her, she go out there, you see. If you call to her, she says: 'what you doing for me? You're not doing anything for me. If I sit down here, nothing will happen. Look at my friends, look at my this'. They want to compare themselves with other people who may be receiving money from abroad"¹¹¹. (C. M.)

"It depends too on the youth because most of the people are supposed to have their parents pushing them. But if the parents can't control you, then of course you end up controlling your parents! So if they say they don't have any means and you are out there, you go on the street. If you get some man to give you some ¢ 50,000 or ¢100,000 and your mother is at home, with no food to eat and you buy the food, you think your

mother will be able to talk? So I think the whole thing is the war situation too. When you look at it, people are traumatised, people are burned out". (A. A.)

Some reasons advanced for this included, the hardships of camp life, a lack of parental control, negative peer pressure and what a youth referred to as 'the need for companionship'. Drug abuse is definitely one of the problems faced by the youth and possibly, the abuse of alcohol¹¹². Some might rely on this as a means of escaping their problems and thus coping somehow. The usefulness, though, of these mechanisms in the long run, leaves much to be desired. Enumerating what she considered to be the problems encountered by her peers, she observed:

- 1. The Camp is very polluted for young girls and to me, morality on the camp is very low. AIDS, which is real, threatens youths, but some don't even believe that. For them all that matters is "LOVE".*
- 2. Parental control over one's child is very hard. The youth don't respect their parents because they can even send their children on the streets to provide sustenance for the family. Youths are involved in all kinds of vices because some have their parents abroad and have been left in the care of relatives and friends who cannot control them much. Their parents also send them money which is misused since there's little or no supervision.*
- 3. Youths also go to the gap and smoke "weeds" (drug abuse) because their parents cannot afford to care for them and they want to live a "high" life.*
- 4. I think most girls have boyfriends for companionship because they think they're growing and need to belong to someone. But it also for help because their parents cannot afford their full upkeep. Some are aware of the risks, others not. But for those in school however, we are careful not to get pregnant because we're given sex education¹¹³ at school to use protection. Some also keep multiple partners and know the risks but just don't care". (M. M.)*

The prospects as indicated above seem to be rather bleak for the young ones. It is however important to note that there are many youths who are striving against all odds¹¹⁴, to make something of their lives. They also dream and plan for a better future. Active involvement in various sporting activities, debating groups and community service provision, are but a few of the ways in which they cope. Indeed many are remarkably determined to succeed as can be observed in the various schools and skill training centres on the camp. The same can be noted from the inspiring testimonies of some who through concerted efforts have made it to the higher institutions of study¹¹⁵. From all indications then, the youth enjoy and learn from being engaged in constructive activities. This builds on their individual strengths and helps them improve their own coping skills whilst helping their peers (Lowicki 2002, Kastberg 2002). There is thus a need for actively engaging the youth in decision making processes and

in assisting them lead meaningful lives. The role education plays in giving a sense of purpose and accomplishment in the life of the youth then, cannot be overemphasised.

6.5 Conclusion

The above discussion has established that refugees employ a wide range of livelihood strategies to cope, be they positive or negative. In doing this, they demonstrate remarkable resilience and resourcefulness in dealing with an otherwise difficult situation. Most of these, however, are at best short-term in addressing the numerous challenges they face in a protracted situation. There is thus a need for programmes that have a long-ranging effect whilst aiding in reconstructing minds and providing vital tools for the future. Education, in all its forms, is known to fill this need. In view of this, the next section will address the educational prospects available to the refugees as a long-term means of coping.

Chapter 7: Education as a long-term means of coping

“It is impossible to calculate the immense costs that are incurred by depriving refugees of education. A refugee who goes without education cannot look forward to a more productive and prosperous future. As a refugee who is unable to attend school or vocational training courses is more likely to become frustrated and involved in illegitimate...activities. A refugee who remains illiterate and inarticulate will be at the serious disadvantage in defending his or her human rights”. Luud Rubbers, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR 2001, Foreword)

7.1 The Role of Education

The importance of education in all aspects of a youth’s life, especially in a camp setting, cannot be overemphasised. As has rightly been observed by various sources, education programmes can be designed to help develop coping skills. It is thus a forward-looking activity that can lessen the incidence of alcohol and drug abuse, teenage pregnancies, prostitution and so on, whilst providing a constructive alternative for young people who might otherwise find fulfilment in participating in other harmful activities. (Sinclair 2001; UNCHR 1995a). Discussing how he broke free of the use of “hard” drugs and “loving¹¹⁶” to many girls, an unaccompanied youth in the FGD said about his life:

“When Mr. Kofie, my Ghanaian guardian died, I followed bad friends and started smoking hard drugs and doing all kinds of bad things. I dropped out of school in the 4th grade. A teacher took me in and advised me ...I resumed 5th grade in 1998/99. Now I’m not smoking and am very serious with school as I want to make something of my life. I had been in the loving business but after I attended an HIV/AIDS workshop, I stopped the girl business”. (20 year-old youth in the 10th grade, FGD, 3/4/04).

Though there could be other reasons other than the following, it also seemed that those who left school much earlier or were not serious with their studies, ended up playing truant. This is what two women had to say about their sons:

“My 3rd son, he is about 19 years now. He go to school small, I think he stopped in 5th grade. That one run away”. (B. B.)

“The second boy, born in '84, he is the one I say is not serious. He is finished with high school but if you call him here to talk...maybe when he writes on paper it will be ok, but if he talks, you will disqualify him. He says he's finished high school in BUDUSEC. He likes rapping and basketball and all but school. He is somewhere in Accra with friends. He doesn't listen to me, he is gone”. (A. A.)

Against this backdrop, I will explore some issues raised with respect to the perceptions of the refugees as to the educational prospects available to the women and children on the camp. I will also consider some challenges faced in accessing these important facilities.

7.2 Educational Prospects on the Camp

Apparently, from the time when make-shift schools were organised under a tree and in UNHCR-provided tents, education has long moved beyond the emergency-response stage to the establishment of permanent structures in response to the protractedness of their displacement. As some youths observed:

“The first year in Ghana, I could not go to school because there were no schools on the camp. I started school in the 2nd year when one was established in a tent under a tree, the place was very bushy. Later they started building the Budumburam Community School which was not furnished”. (M. M.)

“In the beginning, there were no schools, so in 1992, UNHCR established Budumburam Refugee School where I started my first grade”. (R. N., 20 year-old shadow life history respondent)

Since then, a number of schools have been established on the camp and in the adjoining village. The majority of these are Liberian-initiated schools with one primary and two JSS Ghanaian-operated schools but with 85-90% Liberian enrolment¹¹⁷. Whilst the standard age for finishing Primary, JSS and SSS are 12, 15 and 18 respectively, the Budumburam-adjusted ages range from 6-18; 18-20 and 21-25 respectively¹¹⁸. This is apparently done to encourage and enable the majority of the camp population, who happen to be children and youths, to benefit from education on the camp. This and other facts thus seem to support the observations Luud Rubbers when he states: “Indeed, experience shows that once refugees have met their basic need for food, water and shelter, their primary concern is to ensure that their children can go to school”. In most cases then, the refugees recognise the need and important role education plays in providing them knowledge/skills that is useful not only in managing now, but also serves as the basis of hope for the future. As M. M. observes:

“In my situation, I find it very necessary to be a student. I want to be able to say that when I went to Ghana as a refugee, I was able to make something of my life. I also want to achieve something and be somebody in future”.

Thus said, a closer examination of the realities reveal that a complex interplay of factors inform the educational prospects available to the youth and whether or not they benefit from it. Though there are different reasons for the numbers who are not in school, two broad categories emerge. On the one hand are those who though of school-going age, are not at all in school or may never have been. On the other hand are those who have been but have dropped out at various levels. According to some refugees, parents’ lack of appreciation for education due to their own lack of it and the attitude of some youths due to their ability to

express themselves in English even without being able to read and write, are but a few of the reasons for the former. A. A. notes:

“Sometimes, the parents who know the value of education send their children to school early. Sometimes, it’s the attitude too, people don’t want to learn. Even here, a bulk of them, when you talk with them, they will talk with you and speak good English, but give them a piece of paper and they can’t write a simple thing”.

Commenting on the profile of the refugees, the Chairman of the LRWC asserts that the majority of those who came to Ghana were villagers who ran to Monrovia and found themselves on the ships. There are thus as many illiterate ones as there are skilled ones, with women and children constituting the majority. This seems to reflect Sinclair’s (2001) observation that, “refugees are often from poor rural areas with low previous enrolment rates. Often the adults in the family have not completed primary school and do not press their children to do so”. Obviously, some had no or very little education from before, have little interest in getting one and/or where parents are alive, do not have the parental motivation to get it. Some may likely have a false sense of “security” in the Liberians’ ability to express themselves in English, their lingua franca, even when they have not been to school. As C. M. comments:

“They made the announcement that everyone should register their children who is not in school. It was open for all who wanted to do it but some mothers sat down and did not do it”.

Whilst acknowledging these views which may hold true in certain cases, there are more dimensions to the problem than expressed. A. A. admits:

“But look at it now, some of the girls came here as children, they did not have the opportunity to go to school, they didn’t learn anything”.

As she rightly notes and being that circumstances differ, some have simply not had the opportunity to go to school. While the need for formal education cannot be overemphasized, for yet others, it remains an option among the various educational options they perceive to be available. For these then, informal education and/or the acquisition of a trade may be more than sufficient. The argument here is often that not all have the “head” for books. Thus said, the majority of parents, even if they have a low educational background, and youths alike, do see the need for education. They thus have, at one time or the other, tried to benefit from it. As to the sort of assistance needed to enable her cope, one illiterate mother’s response was:

“I just need help with my children’s education, that is all I am fighting for”. (C. P.)

The facts also reveal a more disturbing picture than those already noted for the lack of education on the part of the youth. A main concern is the high dropout rate among them. The reasons advanced by the refugees for this are varied. Enumerating what she thought to be the causes of the high dropout rate among camp children, a youth listed the following:

- *Lack of support, financial assistance to make it in school*
- *Teenage pregnancy*
- *Some just don't want to go to school*
- *Some also believe they'll be resettled so they stop in the hopes of travelling and will rather wait till they get there to continue.*

The biggest problem, however, seemed to be that of financial incapability. Several respondents observed:

"Most of the children who decide to go to school will not dropout like that. If they do maybe it's because of financial reasons. Because most of schools we see on this camp, even the Budumburam School which is supposed to be a Camp Government school, is not free. So because of financial reasons children will drop. Like my daughter at home, she really wants to learn but we don't have the money, it's not easy". (A. A.)

"My children like this, some of them in school. Like this one, she start 10th grade, we can't continue because the money is not there. Then the 2nd one, she was in the 11th grade and she stopped. She like school but we can't continue because the money not there. My children, they stop school. It's not easy, it's hard for me these days".(B. B.)

"No hand so for them to go to school, it is very difficult. So sometimes they put them out of school, no money. It is now that UN really trying for the education here. Like before, our children were paying full school fees and most of the parents could not afford for their children to go to school". (C. M.)

Apparently, since UNHCR's return, quite a lot has been done to ensure that as many as possible are able to access this basic right. A mother observes:

"But now UN has set in to open classes and I think most of the children are in school now. Like my children, I couldn't afford school fees, now they are in school. When they came, they made announcement that everyone should register their children who are not in school. So I went and registered them. Then they asked me what school I want them to go to and I told them, they were able to send letter to the right school to accept them". (C. M.)

The general consensus was that much was being done in the educational sector to ensure that more benefit from it. Commenting on the ongoing educational activities in the camp presently, a respondent explained:

"We have the only UNHCR-supported school, the Budumburam Refugee Community School (BUDUSEC). But as I said, since she came back, she decided to assist even the other private institutions. Besides this camp school, there are many other schools on the camp which are private; we have a few high schools, JSS, few SSS, elementary

schools and so on. I cannot tell you the exact number of schools here. We are operating the Ghanaian System so we're under the Ghanaian syllabus but we have small of a mixed system. Some Liberian subjects we teach but we have to go along with the host's system thus their syllabus. Besides these schools we also have other training and Literacy programmes where you have the older people go to school. So we're doing everything and in my opinion, things are much on a level now than before because we have literacy programmes". (P. C.)

These efforts are really commendable but the facts also indicate that many more are still unable to access it. While some could not benefit because they simply did not register when the call went out, there is reason to believe that many did want to take advantage of this exercise. Unfortunately, some who had genuine financial concerns were however not considered because their children were already in school. This condition, I believe, should be reviewed so these parents can be helped where a genuine need is discerned. A respondent summarises the situation thus:

"It was open for all who went to register their children, but some mothers sat down and did not do it. But they told us all to come and register if our children are not in school, but once they're in school, do not. Those who already had their children in school but could not afford to support them were not allowed to register because their children were already in school". (C. M.)

Obviously, others also drop out for reasons other than economic ones. The headmaster referred to these as "self-imposed" or "unofficial" reasons. Confirming the list above, he asserted:

"Some are there to be resettled so immediately they think they might make it, they leave school. When it doesn't work, they have to come back and start all over again. Some also leave without informing the authorities because it is pregnancy". (Interview, Headmaster of SSS Section, BUDUSEC, 3/4/04)

This "resettlement syndrome" is rather disturbing as many do not only end up unsuccessful in the programme, but also lose out on a fine opportunity to be educated. Whilst they may attempt to return, there is no guarantee that they can gain admission back to the school. Sometimes the means will not even be available to do so as a lot of money may have been spent in the process of trying to be resettled. It is apparently the course of wisdom to remain in the school until the day one is actually leaving the country, except when circumstances do not allow this.

The refugees indicated that others are simply not serious with education and are thus unwillingly to take advantage of it even when the opportunity presents itself. Infact some of

these are in school but are very relaxed with attendance. A youth poured out her frustrations about the attitude of some youth vis-à-vis education and the challenges this presents to others who sincerely wish to study:

“Being on the camp and being a student is a real challenge and very suppressing for me due to the extreme peer pressure. Most of my peers are not in school. There is a temptation to drop out of school and follow the fashion on the camp. All the girls want is to parade around in nice clothes, so it’s a real challenge for a student to concentrate on school work. Even my older sister dropped at a point in time and is now behind me by 2 years. For instance my cousin who got to SSSI has dropped out because she doesn’t think school is enough. Some who have friends or relations that have travelled to the US and other places, they are being sent remittances/gifts which they take to school and blow away as they wish. These ones are normally very rude to their teachers, break rules like plaiting their hair in school which is against the rules¹¹⁹. They do all sorts of things so they’ll be sent home, especially as they don’t even want to be there in the first place. They influence a lot and can really affect other students who watch them. They also do not allow the others to concentrate on their studies which also affect everybody negatively. I personally feel affected because these unserious ones disrupt attention in class”. (M. M.)

A mother also said about her daughter who, at seventeen, was still in the 4th grade:

“That one her own self, she don’t want to go to school. Sometimes, I will beat her. All she wants to do is to go out”. (C. M)

Another disturbing reason that kept coming up was that of teen pregnancy. Unfortunately, as indicated by the statistics¹²⁰, many young ones are in this predicament. Infact teen pregnancy is an issue of major concern on the camp, if not alarming. The causes have been ascribed to many things, prominent among which is the vulnerability of girls on the camp. A mother argues this does not automatically suggest that they do not want an education as they may have made a mistake:

I am told many drop out due to pregnancy?: Yeah, but some of them there it is like an error they did and they correct themselves and go back to school. Like my daughter, she has this child, but she still wants to learn”. (A. A.)

Much as they may want to, pregnancy does seem to stand in the way of continuing with one’s education. The Chairman of the CEB indicated that whilst there was a law in Liberia that enabled pregnant students to continue their schooling after delivery¹²¹, no such policy could realistically be implemented on the camp. The usual practise then is that, pregnant ones drop out of school due to shame and/or have to do so after some time. More often than not, they end up staying home anyway as there are no nursery facilities to care for their children to enable them continue their schooling. In an informal conversation with a teen mother, she

indicated that she dropped out in JSS 2 due to pregnancy. As at the time we were speaking, her son was two years old and she was still at home. She explained that she was no more loving to the child's father and was not working. She thus did not have the means to care for the child much less pay her way through school. Interestingly, teen pregnancy is not only a cause but also a consequence of dropping out of school. A mother said about her daughter who dropped out of school in the 10th grade:

“Bare me myself, I get one big belly (pregnancy) now. I asked her where she went to, she says she is around. She pregnant now. So I asking her to manage. If to say things were fine with me, I can't allow my children, they don't even finish high school then they start borning? She herself she don't go to school, I don't know how that child will go to school”. (B. B.)

Recognising the seriousness of the situation, attempts have been made to reach out to these teenage mothers. The UNHCR through the CRA, thus initiated a programme to help these acquire some practical skills. This was to serve the dual purpose caring for their children to enable the mothers avail themselves of this provision. Of those registered, 120 were chosen to pioneer the programme. Unfortunately, it appears to be at a standstill. A parent also complains about the inadequate groundwork laid for it. This is because all the girls are mixed up with no differentiation between their educational levels, etc. this seems to drawback some whilst serving as a deterrent to others who feel they cannot catch up. It is thus demotivating for many and is thus counterproductive.

“This Teenage Programme, It's not working! It's at a standstill. Even if you are learning a skill you must be able to take some notes, but some of them can't cope. Getting people to be in a programme, you must screen them properly. You can't put a 10th grade student in the same programme with a 1st grade student, and think you are teaching them hairdressing, you understand? How are you going to distinguish the two? But if you go over there you find something like that. The best thing you can do for people like that who haven't been to school is to give them some money to do business. Some of the children are out of high school, but they are teenage girls, and they don't have anything to do so they want to learn these skills. Then another person is there, teenage too, but doesn't know anything, not even in the 4th grade, and they are together. How can you teach the lesson? So those ones that don't know anything, haven't been to school before or just started in a very low grade, you put them in a different place. Maybe give them some tuition or kindly money to do business. So they can teach these girls practical sewing, they can do it. So instead of going in school where you teach them how many stitches, this or that, get somebody to do a practical thing and I'm trying to propose something like that here. Somebody came to give us a donation and I'm telling my people here that we should take that donation and buy some machines to get some of these girls who don't know anything and give them practical training”. (A. A.)

Thus said, some are indeed benefiting from the education offered on the camp and are planning ahead for a meaningful life. These however express frustration with the system as it seems to limit their prospects. Even after completion of their course, many are unable to go any further and sometimes do not have the means to pursue other alternatives to enable them upgrade their skills. An encouraging factor here is the availability of the DAFI scholarship programme which was started in Ghana in 1993. According to *The Refugee* magazine, approximately 200 students have benefited with a total of 62 benefiting in 2003. The personal accounts of some beneficiaries indicate that with persistence and hard work, some might actually be able to continue with their education. These and other such opportunities are worth reaching out to, especially for the young ladies.

Fig. 21 Mostly Refugee Students busy writing exams in Ghanaian School in the village; Fig. 22 School Children in front of school during Break; Fig. 23 Skill training in Dressmaking; Fig. 24 Skill Training in Shoe-making on the camp



Source: Mr. Cornell (Snr.)'s photographs

Source: Researcher's own photographs

7.3 Skill Training

For the majority of women who cannot take advantage of formal education, skill training provides a viable solution. Liberians seem to appreciate the importance of acquiring a skill. Indeed many qualified ones are to be found among their ranks. These, by virtue of their past skills, are usually able to volunteer their services in helping their fellows. It also provides them greater access to certain advantages and or little jobs that might bring in some money.

“Just imagine if I didn’t know anything and if I didn’t have any skills, any experience, what will happen to me with all these children? But I live with the skills that I have... it is those skills that have helped me to be able to do something here. I think as a skilled person, I am doing fine”. (A. A.)

Many have apparently taken advantage of the various training programmes offered to learn a skill or upgrade existing ones. These are thus able to contribute significantly, not only to their upkeep, but in providing much-needed services for others. A lady who has benefited from a training programme and is currently operating a sewing shop with a friend observed:

“Being on the camp has benefited me because I have learnt a trade, am self-employed and can do some work on my own to care for myself and my son. People have also benefited from free programmes I think learning on the camp is cheaper than in other places. There are also different training services and some go to school partly free”. (J.K., shadow life history respondent)

Various instructors at some of these training schools confirmed that many were very interested in acquiring a skill and this was borne out by the numbers said to be graduating from such programmes. The head of one such schools indicated that some were really willing to learn inspite of great financial constraints. She had initiated a form of scholarship where the students who could afford it, contributed to support the less fortunate ones. This was however unreliable and could do with a more systematic support system. Given the peculiar situation faced by women on the camp, such training is indispensable. To ensure that it addresses the problem of women’s dependence and the like, much has to be done to ensure its sustainability. As one respondent succinctly observed:

“If skills must be taught to these women then you must empower them in a way; Financial Empowerment so that they can be independent”. (A. A.)

Not all however are able to benefit from these programmes. Some women feel limited by their situation to participate even though they would really want to. As it were, they were living from hand to mouth. They thus anticipated going hungry if they left their trading activities to get a skill that could be useful in the long-term. It is worth noting that those who expressed this reservation in the course of the interview had no formal education. This could possibly be a restrictive lens through which they may perceive or not, certain opportunities.

“I want to take part in a skill training programme but if I go, then it mean I have to close the place, that’s my problem... and if I do, then it’ll be bad for all of us”. (B. B.)
“They open school like hairdressing, sewing, tie & dye, baking, etc. But you know when I go sit down there and I return, no food for the children. So I can’t put my hand there. It’s good but I can’t go because when I leave, nobody to sell for me. I have to

come back and sell before we can eat. I haven't trained for even one of the programmes because only the children and myself here, I got nobody". (C. P.)

“Often, many skill-training programs assume some level of prior education, most notably in terms of literacy” (Martin F.S 2004:81). Some refugee women, having been denied education in their country of origin and host society, may unfortunately not be able to benefit from these programs. Some are also willing but do not get the opportunity to do so. A respondent observed that there’s a tendency on the part of implementers to retrain the same people over and over again. They thus do not give the chance to yet others who may equally live up to the challenge. There is also a lack of Trainer of Trainers (TOT) to pass on the skills. Thus whilst others had been repeatedly trained, others did not have it at all. This seemed to be especially so for training workshops organised by some mainstream organisations. There was an implicit suggestion that they did not want to waste money on people they had not tried before. They also seemed to prefer ones they could dictate to. If this was really the case, I believe it is really unfortunate as it defeats the very purpose for which training programmes are designed – that of assisting as many as possible to acquire a practical and/or intellectual skill. A woman assessed the training programmes thus:

“They are getting involved but on what level now? Because what I noticed is that it’s the same people over and over. If we could just deal with this group, train them, and finish with them and help them to train other people. That’s what I don’t see around here, TOT (the Trainer of Trainers), I don’t see it. You go for this workshop they say it’s TOT but when they come then you use the same people to make sure, you know, they are doing what you wanted to do. That’s what I’m seeing here, I don’t see the same women training others. You use the people but they are the same people over and over. The same person who will go to WISE workshop for the same domestic violence will be the same person maybe who will go to UNHCR workshop and will be the same person who will go to Christian Council workshop, you know, just like that. If you ask me, everybody should be given an opportunity but sometimes the donors of the workshops they don’t feel comfortable with that. But it is always good to expose everybody, to let everybody have a general knowledge of what is to be done. Maybe the person who you think cannot deliver what you have taught is the one who will actually deliver it, at the low-skilled level”. (A. A.)

7.4 Conclusion

It is obvious from the foregoing discussion that most Liberian refugees do see the need for getting one form of education or the other. Parents as well as youths thus strive to take advantage of the opportunities available to further their education either formally or informally. Whilst efforts at providing more educational opportunities are being stepped up, the extent to which these are accessible to the majority leaves room for improvement. The

youth, especially adolescent girls, seem particularly disadvantaged as they grapple with teenage pregnancy, negative peer pressure with its associated vices and what has been termed the “resettlement syndrome”. These are reflected in the high dropout rates as well as the numbers who have never and/or are not in school. Much has been said about the need for education especially in situations of displacement. As Dr. J.E. Kwegyir Aggrey, a renowned Ghanaian educationist said: “Educate a man, you educate an individual, educate a woman and you educate a nation”. Far from suggesting that men’s education is not important, and that is not the point here, educating women is especially useful given the roles they often have to assume in displacement. The need for educating girls cannot be overemphasised. Apart from getting an education in school to enable them hopefully plan for a better future, sexual reproductive education goes a long way in helping prevent unwanted diseases and/or pregnancies. It is also essential to provide a conducive atmosphere to enable teenage mothers get an education whilst their children are being cared for. As the adage goes: “it is better to teach a man how to fish than to give him fish everyday”. Education plays such a role in the lives of the refugees as it encourages self-reliance whilst providing the needed skills for coping both now and in the long term. Much can also be achieved by way of peace education and other such courses to help disabuse war-scarred minds. I will conclude this discussion by quoting the apt words of some DAFI beneficiaries: “in order to have a lasting solution to refugee crisis, education should be prioritised for us. We believe this will drastically reduce, if not eliminate the dependency syndrome on donor and host countries. Viable education is the only way everybody can be self-reliant.” In the subsequent chapter, I will consider the refugees perceptions about “home” in the light of the three proposed solutions of return, reintegration and resettlement.

Chapter 8: “Home is where you make it”: Return, Integration or Resettlement?

In this chapter, I will explore the refugees’ perceptions and reasons informing their choice of “durable” solution. The three traditional solutions proposed by the UNHCR and implemented by policy maker are, Voluntary Repatriation (VR) or Return to one’s Country of Origin, Reintegration in the Country of First Asylum and Resettlement in a 3rd Country. Of these, VR is projected as the most desirable solution. It has been claimed that VR helps avoid the painful transition that other refugees must face since these returnees go back to familiar cultures and life styles in their “homeland” (Martin 2004). Reintegration is the next preferred solution and calls on host governments to promote assimilation of refugees especially by facilitating their naturalization (UNHCR 1996). As a last resort, and only in the context of refugees having special needs, is the officially least preferred option of resettlement implemented, and even then, for less than 1% worldwide. Chimni (2000) suggests that states may be reluctant to offer resettlement places because of the end of the cold war and the fact that refugees are coming from the poor world.

8.1 Reasons Informing Choice of Solution

The reasons advanced by refugees as to the solution they consider viable and/or applicable to them, are complex and varied. Even though resettlement is the least preferred option in official implementing terms, it remains the most preferred for refugees. Commenting on the need to test the hypothesis assuming that all refugees desire to return home, Chimni (1999) cites several studies which have found out situations in which refugees may or may not want to return. These include, among others, the passage of time; the reluctance of 2nd generation refugees to return to a home they may know little about; the transformed meaning of home to individuals and groups profoundly affected by exile; and the idea of a nostalgic homeland as compared to a home which meets practical and security needs. These could well make return an unattractive choice. Reintegration has also proven to be a very suitable solution in cases where it has been possible. A lot though is required on the part of host government, host community, the refugees as well as other organizations involved if it is to be a sustainable solution. Hence, more is required than the mere political wishing or accepting that refugees can integrate as and when necessary.

8.2 Return/ Voluntary Repatriation

“Security is felt by the one experiencing it, so we cannot be forced to go”. A Liberian Refugee Woman

“There is an implicit assumption, even bordering on compellation, that all African refugees desire to return ‘home’” (ibid 2000:356). Yet in situations of protracted displacement when refugees have spent many years in exile, their choice of solution is usually informed by more than a nostalgic claim to their homeland or to a “cozy romanticized home” to which one must necessarily return. Infact many of the refugees did not consider return and/or repatriation as a viable option either now or in the near future.

Prominent among the reasons cited was the fear of return for security reasons, especially among women. These fears were mostly in relation to the persecution engendered by their work and/or position in the society prior to the war. They also insisted that, 15 years on, these elements are still in place thus constituting a danger to their well-being. There was also general pessimism with regards to an actual end of the war. These sentiments have especially been fuelled by the 1997 VR exercise which turned out to be a fiasco as the war did indeed erupt again in 2002. This was the case in spite of the official optimism and assurance to the contrary. Some respondents relate their experiences and express their fears thus:

“For some of us the kind of work we have been doing, dealing with children ... school work; and most of the children are the ones who tend to be the rebels still in Liberia who are involved in the armed robberies, different, different things. So for me, much as I want to go back, given the hardships here, I know that if I go back I can get a good job. At the same time I am thinking about my own security, because going back and getting a job is different from going back and your life is secure. Especially with people that you find around you, we have been involved in school business, students with all kinds of problems. If they don't do well you suspend them, you expel them, all these kind of things behind us. So to go back with these students and even though they are in the army, but who knows? (A. A.)

“I came to Ghana in October 1990 and have never been back since. They came for my husband because they say he should give money from the government. He didn't have the money in the house because nobody was expecting that. Me myself I'm a treasurer in the market, so they were also behind me. Our marketing president too at the market, after they kill her, me myself I knew that they'll get me anytime; because they believe that I had people's money, they are coming to me for their money. So I can't go there because the same market people. You know market people, you see how they can be harsh in the market? So they are the same people in the market there in Liberia. They are not coming as rebels but they can pass through somebody. They hurt me before, I get it in mind, so I can't say rebels will arrest me, but they can pass through anybody to do anything to me. I don't really know if I will ever go back home but I'm not sure I'll be doing that”. (B. B.)

“I have never returned to Liberia because I am afraid to go back there due to the position I held back then. I used to work for the finance ministry as a pay mistress, under the Doe administration, paying people in the various ministries. People knew me because of this work. A boy that my family and I were helping, my house help, was the one that entered the house. That’s how come my daughter is paralysed, they threw her against the wall and she was only a baby. He had turned out to be a rebel. So because of that and I’m sure that they’re still there, so I do not want to go back home. Some of the rebels are in position now. According to people that go and come, they say that they are coming on fine now, they saying the war has stopped. That’s what they’re saying but I don’t believe them because they’ll say the war is finished, the next minute you hear something else. We all are hoping that it should be such that people can go back. Charles Taylor is no more there but I want to believe it was the section that was in the bush...No I will not be in Norway forever, maybe I’ll go some place else to visit but not Liberia. Maybe the Lord will speak to me for going back home one day -maybe- but right now, I don’t know. Because of the things that happened to me, I’m still afraid (crying)”. (C. M.)

These fears can simply not be dismissed as baseless when considered in the light of these comments by a refugee official. He went with the mission to Liberia prior to the 1997 VR exercise and explained the situation as follows:

“It depends on the area you live in back in the place in Liberia. We talk about disarmament and it is still not complete. People are waiting to see complete disarmament because, some warlords still have their guns and people are thinking that one day something might spark up that will cause them to run back to Ghana. So until complete disarmament has taken place and UNHCR comes to say: “it is ok, the place is safe now so you can go” and they begin repatriation, then of course some of us might be confident to go back. So we’re waiting for UNHCR to say its safe back in Liberia”. (Interview, Ex-Chairman of LRWC)

This, however, is just the type of assurance UNHCR is unable to give. It indicates that, whilst vital to re-establishing peace, disarmament is ongoing but nowhere near finished. They are thus not in a position to say when and whether complete disarmament will be achieved or not. Some officials were also of the view that some refugees are reluctant to go for fear of their lives as they may be potential witnesses against war crime perpetrators, whilst others belong to the latter category and are running away from prosecution, so to speak. In informal conversations, some did refer to near-brushes with “their past enemies and/or persecutors”. Some even mentioned that they had received threats from such elements and had thus had to seek protection from the police. Even though the general consensus seemed to be that such elements were present in the camp, they could neither be pinpointed nor were there official records on them¹²². The UNHCR however asserts that the second phase of the registration and documentation¹²³ process should help identify some of these elements. At the moment then, any further attempts at pursuing this could only be speculative.

Other concerns expressed had to do with the loss of family and community support systems. Some women even equated return not only to loss of life, but also to endangering the life of their dependants. For these then, nothing, not even the UNHCR-organised repatriation exercise, is a safe enough alternative, much less the so-called attractive return package. In their view, nothing is worth exchanging their lives for, which is at least safe so long as they remain in Ghana where they also have freedom of movement. The following comments on these issues by various respondents are insightful:

“Because of what happened in the house that day, I can’t go back, I don’t even know if there is house there for me. I can’t stand up and leave all my children to go because I don’t know who will come to our rescue again like what happened for the first time. They say 1st fool is fool, but 2nd fool, then you intentionally put yourself in trouble. Yeah, I hear about the VR exercise, 1997 too. I think even if they’ll give package this time (2004 exercise), it’ll not be equal to that time. That time they give real package and they give me good reason but I was not interested. That one it not value equal to my life. I don’t know how the situation is back in Liberia, because I am not there and I don’t want to know about it. Because if you want to know something, you want to know and hear good thing to see whether you can make it. Here you go Accra, you come back. If you don’t cause no trouble, nobody will search you. If I can get the plane fare to go, I don’t mind but I’m not going just now”. (B. B.)

“October is not an option for me, and the next thing, I don't even have a house there, nothing I have. What I had was destroyed... because right now even if we are going to have elections, it'll not be safe; it's too early to get all the bad seeds out of the area”. (A. A.)

“We were living in our own house but I don’t know if something happened to it after I fled. My mother was the reason why I really wanted to go back home but during the last war, a rocket fell on my mother’s house whilst she and my three sisters were inside, so now I have nobody to go to. So I’d rather be in a different land and go through whatever the Lord has for me. I wouldn’t want to go there now, I have no idea of going there now. Maybe in the near future, I’ll try but right now, I don’t have any thing/anybody there now, nothing there for me to say I’m going”. (C. M.)

Others also kick against return due to the lack of socio-economic opportunities available in Liberia coupled with the fact that most have somewhat settled down in their 15 years of stay in the camp. This may be understandable when viewed within the context that Liberia is still considered unsafe with unreliable infrastructural support and lack of jobs for the numerous returnees and IDPs already in place. Some simply do not want to go through the uncertainties and frustrations of starting from scratch, especially as these may have lost everything in the war. Added to this is the hope, even if floundering, of making it through the ongoing resettlement programme. The comments of this respondent, uttered as much on his behalf as on behalf of the others, sums matters up:

“But like I said, I have stayed here 15 years, I’m not working, I don’t have anything, how do I go home now? How do I start life? When I go home now before I look for job, what do I do, where am I going? Me, I want to go home but I will not go home until the UNHCR, the government, the International Bodies say I must go, and then

I'll think about going. What will UNHCR do prior to our going, what package they intend giving?

What package will you want them to give?: Give us package, substantial package that'll keep us up for... I'm speaking for the benefit of everybody now. But what can you do? It is unfortunate that after 15 years of staying, we could not work to earn something to prepare to go home. It is very much unfortunate. But now we're talking of going home. That's our home, fine, but our situation back there and I've, we've been here all this time.

So would you want to go with the VR in October?: It is voluntary; you yourself said it is voluntary. So I would look at the situation still (raises voice agitatedly). That UNHCR did, you know, they're planners, they plan, they estimate¹²⁴: 'by this time, things will be all right'. So if they say ok, things are alright now you can go home, let's say some of us will go home but we'll take some time before we go. I have to go home...yeah, that is my home... the alternative will be home but I mean, I hope and pray that I can be privileged to be resettled so that in about 2/3 years time, I can gather something before going home. I will be resettled and will be doing something at least". (P. C.)

Thus said, others prefer to return to their country of origin, even if unsafe, with the aim of picking up the threads and with the hope of rebuilding their lives. This is especially the case for those who see no way out of the exile situation which seems to present a suite of challenges in ensuring even the most basic survival needs. A respondent observes:

"Well, most of the people here now I've been talking to are saying that if they can't find their way out, they'll go back home (sounds more involuntary than voluntary). Some say they'll go because no help is coming from nowhere, so they're forced to go. They say if they stay here, nowhere to escape to. Like the feeding program¹²⁵ they're bringing now, they just started it. And some of them, they're saying that they are getting older so it's better for them to go home to struggle to see where they can push their blessing further. Most of the people going, some cannot bear it any longer. They want to go back and struggle because they think they might make it". (C. M.)

"Most recently now, after you have stayed in exile for long, some people cannot really keep up with things. So despite the situation, they still have to go and people have been going home since, ofcourse, the Interim government was put in place. But to tell you the truth, the situation is not fine there, even presently". (P. C.)

A respondent asserts that others are also forced by their relatives abroad to go as their sources of income are curtailed. A respondent asserts:

"Some of them telling their people: "there's peace in Liberia now so I don't see why you people still in Ghana, I think you better go home". One family I met, she said that her daughter called to say that there's peace in Liberia now so all her attention will be on the other family members there. So her mother should go back and join the others. I think she leaving next week. She doesn't want to go but then if she stays here, her daughter will not send her Teku (Ghanaian coin of small value used in the past). She is forced to go". (C. M.)

Yet others have political aspirations of helping rebuild their country with the skills and experience acquired in exile. Others hope to provide the necessary manpower support needed

to reconstruct their ailing economy. Not many women, though, expressed these desires in the short term. Even though they anticipated returning to Liberia eventually, most envisaged getting better opportunities for themselves and/or their children now, but in another country. The exception was a lady operating a skill training school on the camp. She had plans of transferring it to Liberia as soon as possible. Her aim, she claimed, was the need to train women there to be better equipped for what lay ahead – the task of getting Liberia back on its feet. Whilst these noble ideas could well be her motivation, it also turned out in the course of the conversation that she had been forced to leave her children unattended to in Liberia and greatly desired to rejoin them. Some also felt comfortable traveling to and from Liberia whenever they could¹²⁶. They, however, preferred to be based in the camp and maintain their status quo. While such a practice might not be sustainable in the long term, they obviously hoped to make the best of both worlds¹²⁷.

Fig. 25 Commercial Vehicles of the GPRTU plying the camp and Liberia; Fig. 26 A vehicle loaded and ready for the trip to Liberia



Source: Researcher's own photographs

It must also be noted that the decision to return is not always forced, but a conscientious choice by the refugees. Actually, a number took advantage of the repatriation exercise to return in 1997. Of those who returned, some were killed in the subsequent war, others fled to Ghana but those who remained in Liberia may well have somehow managed to re-organise their lives. Information pertaining to the latter, however, was not easily available. There have also been several cases of spontaneous returnees, many of whom went at the risk of their lives¹²⁸. Others also took advantage of the UNHCR-organised voluntary repatriation exercise in 2004, with some expressing the sentiment that it was better to try and make it “home”¹²⁹. In my view, it would be interesting to follow up these ones to know how they are settling. This might suggest ways to improve upon and sustain the whole exercise. It could also provide the

assurance needed for yet others who really want to reestablish their lives back in Liberia but are hindered by genuine fears of not making it.

8.3 Local Integration

In the absence of voluntary repatriation, reintegration in the first country of asylum is considered the next best option by UNHCR and policy makers, even if the facts contest its viability. Especially in the Third world, host nations are often unwilling and/or unable to provide the services and resources needed to facilitate effective assimilation of refugees into the local economy. The logistics needed to determine and accord individual refugee status are often lacking. The majority of these de facto refugees are thus denied any advantages that may accrue as a result of this legal recognition. Often, long term development assistance that benefits both refugees and host communities are lacking or inadequate, leading to conflicts with the often poor hosts.

The refugees articulated a number of reasons informing their decision in this area. Many expressed gratitude to the Ghanaian Authorities for the land, relative security and freedom of movement they have. This was especially so considering that Ghana was not the immediate neighbour expected to host them. The views expressed by this refugee are quite reflexive of that expressed by many with respect to the host government.

“I want to thank the Government for the patience to have us here given our long situation, we thank the people of Ghana. I have benefited from the security provided by the Government; personally I have my life to be grateful for. We pray that they’ll continue to cooperate with us to help us in the area of security, recovery and continue our friendship, because the refugee situation is not the end of it all. We are all Africans and we are in West Africa and like Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, he advocated for the United States of Africa”. (P. C.)

However, integration for many could not be an option because of the limited opportunities available to them in all their years of displacement. Notable among these was the glaring lack of jobs outside the camp. Besides, they considered Ghana to be no different from Liberia as both are developing countries with struggling economies. In their view, it offered less promising prospects especially for the youth. In expressing her reservations, a respondent expressed these concerns:

“To be here in Ghana...how do I work now, I’ve been here since 1999. For instance, I have this belief that if we leave from here to go, my big daughter will be able to work in a different country. I don’t consider Ghana to be a different country, for me, Ghana is almost like Liberia. You know in Ghana here, look at how young you are, where you

are. This girl¹³⁰ is young too and she is leaving out of college. Some children here are young, they are also out of college. Because of the war we have set backs, so she cannot get a good job in this country. Even the Ghanaians themselves, if you are not educated with skills and training, you won't get a good job. I think the UN¹³¹ workshops we went to one time they told us that if we found an employer who is willing to give us a job, all we have to do is to inform UN and they will process work permit for us. Actually I have done search for a job.

Would you be willing to work in Ghana?: Yeah (emphatically), if I could get a job I would do it!

Are you sure?: That's the only thing, you know, I am not certain. Because when it comes to documents and all these other things, I left them, I didn't bring anything. Everything of mine was destroyed. (A. A.)

This lack of documentation is also a matter of concern. Most refugees apparently lost their documents during flight or in some other way. They thus do not have anything backing their claims to whatever qualifications they may possess. The UNHCR admitted that such refugees may loose out on educational or job opportunities. Unfortunately, this appears to be more of a reality than a supposition. Many did indeed complain of Ghanaians discriminating against them simply because they are "Liberian refugees". In fact in a TV phone-in programme, some Ghanaians expressed all manner of reservations about the "lazy", "husband-snatching", "prostituting" Liberians whose "only preoccupation is to dress up and do nothing" (TV Africa 2004b). I think these views are not only misguided, but a very unhealthy, albeit unfair way of dealing with them. Sadly, it does dictate ways in which some, even employers, deal with them. Admittedly, there are bad nuts, as is indeed the case with any society, but that is simply not an acceptable standard by which to measure the rest; if any measuring should at all be done.

Others complained about the difficult living conditions and high cost of living as compared to pre-war Liberia. A woman expressed these view about life in Ghana and why she would not want to naturalise:

"It's hard more than in Liberia before the war. I wouldn't want to naturalise. In Ghana I like plenty things and the people but Ghana is hard, it is hard ooh my sister".
(C. P.)

Some indicated that it is difficult to integrate into Ghana since the camp is like a mini-Liberia. Even though they have been living among Ghanaians in the surrounding villages and many have picked up a few expressions, few are able to speak Fante or Twi. They thus have a real limited chance of naturalizing since ability to speak, at least, one Ghanaian language is a requirement. This is especially the case for those in the camps though the situation might be

different for self-settled refugees¹³². Others also understand and may even be able to speak the language but refrain from using it except where necessary. In the case where marriages have taken place, it has been observed that the mates had opted to learn and speak Liberian English (some had even lived in Liberia prior to the war). Some also complained about Ghanaians discriminating against them thus making them feel unwelcome. The consensus was that they would rather stick together in the camp, making it a “home away from home”, than be disregarded by their fellow humans just because they were refugees.

An important factor explaining why many do not consider return and/or reintegration as an option in the long term, however, is the hope of resettlement. In so far as the latter is ongoing in the camp, the refugees continue clinging to the belief that it is very much a possibility; even if the reality points to the contrary. The same woman, who did not want to integrate because of the difficult life, did not mind staying on because as she explains:

“I will be here then next time, in case God open my way then I can also go to America or something like that. But if I have the choice, I will like to go somewhere other than be here in Ghana”. (C. P.)

Some have even managed to convince themselves that the issuance of and subsequent possession of the ID card will confer this privilege on them. We know from the earlier chapter, however, that this is simply not the case. The views of this resettled refugee woman sums it all up:

“The people are remaining, especially since UN has asked everyone to go through the ID System. Everyone will have the opportunity to go and sit for an interview; it all depends on your own spirit. For this year, at least, I’m sure because they say some different countries are coming. It’s not only Norway, also Canada, Australia and others are here. That’s why I’m encouraging them to wait and see”. (C. M.)

8.4 Resettlement

As already indicated, on the whole, less than 1% of refugees are resettled worldwide, implying that very few percentages from individual countries get to benefit from this solution. Resettlement, however, remains the preferred solution of the displaced majority even in cases where people may recognize the unlikelihood of their ever accessing this option. The intractable position of many refugees was that, in so far as resettlement continues to be an implemented solution as is currently the case on the camp, it is a hope worth holding on to, as if one’s very life depended on it.

Various reasons are advanced for this, common among which is socio-economic advantage and the opportunity many perceive resettlement to offer; that of enabling one to start life afresh. This same reason seems to be a great deterrent to their wanting to integrate in Ghana as they consider it no different from Liberia socio-economically. This is explicitly expressed below:

“If I just go on with a refugee life, I will be trying to go to another place to resettle. I want to go and empower myself financially, then I can go back home and then maybe have full opportunities for my children. My daughter, she is born in 1975, she is almost 20 something. She is out of high school ever since and she is just sitting here. If we leave from here even to America, she can work. Even if she goes to some kind of basic nursing school, she can work until I have been successful to join my mother...by this time, I'm settled. Even if my children are into whatever society we go into, and I'm going back home, you know, financially strong to do something new, ok. Maybe by the time I can go to another country to stay there for some years...for me 8 years from now things should be okay. Given life, with God willing, 8 years if I'm in a different country, I can work and earn some money. No matter what the work is but I can do some work, earn some money and go. If everything is ok, I can go back home, at least in my old age”. (A. A.)

Apparently, concern about the future of their children also seems to be a strong motivation why these women strive to be resettled at all cost. According to Zetter (1999), displaced people's children become a focal point in more future-oriented displaced people's lives. Their response to forced migration is to dedicate their physical, emotional and cultural energy to their children, even more so than in the past. This is often the case with Liberian women especially as children are viewed as insurance in one's old age. For them though, “home” or success is intricately linked with resettlement. As expressed above, this is seen as a reliable way by which they can ensure a solid future for their children. From all indications, however, getting a place on the programme is no mean task. A respondent who is currently in Norway, hints at how demoralizing it could be in trying to get into the programme:

“Well, in 1992, I applied to UNHCR to assist me with my children and I explained to them that I did not have anyone to file for me. In 1994, I applied again. After this I stopped applying because I was tired now”. (C. C.)

After several trials a few have given up. For the majority, however, no obstacle is too great. No matter how many times they are rejected, they hold on to the hope that they would wake up one day to be told it was all a terrible mistake. One respondent¹³³ puts it this way:

“In spite of several refusals, are you still hopeful of acceptance on a resettlement programme?: To go to America? Am I being refused for any substantial reasons? It's not fair! Here we are, we are traumatised and you are not even able to give to your children all you have to give to them. You see sometimes you go for immigration, you wait for them to ask you. They ask you specific questions, so if you are not asked

something and you go beyond it, you are expected to fail. Because some of those people, they are rigid, they come with all kinds of things.” (A. A.)

This also pertains to those who may even have little prospect of ever making it. Such is especially the case among mothers and the youth who see it as the only way to insure the future of their children and/or themselves. For many women, the Women at Risk is a perfectly valid category for which they qualified. Their justification being that they are saddled with the sole responsibility of caring for their children with no jobs to fall back on. This and the fact that others in a similar situation like theirs had earlier qualified, is good enough reason for them to cling to this hope even if unsure of ever getting through. A woman and a youth respectively, expressed their hope thus:

“For me, I don’t have anybody in America that sending for me to say, my husband or my maa or my paa there will send for me. Some time people coming for their family members, but I don’t have nobody. So I’ll be here and these things, maybe I can write letter explaining that I’m a single mother. I can see people with no education going like that. Even the woman that was here in 1999, she didn’t go to school much, they say Political Asylum. When she going to interview that day, she had somebody that she’ll talk and he’ll interpret for her. She was blessed. Maybe I can go with “Woman at Risk” or they say Political asylum, then maybe I may go, I say maybe. But I know one day, the same God that help others will help me. But UN knows my case and they may help”. (B. B.)

“I would also like to go to an advanced (developed) country to learn even more and achieve much more. After high school, I want to travel to attend university and work. I don’t want to learn at the local level again as I cannot afford fees for higher education. The main reason I want to travel is to build up my country later and make life good for my family. I don’t think it fair that my dreams shouldn’t become a reality just because I’m a refugee.” (M. M.)

Few expressed the absolute fear or impossibility of ever returning home, and for which reason they felt that life would have to be elsewhere. The fact that some have been granted political asylum, however, suggests that such fears do exist. Much, though, depends then on their ability to convince the authorities of the genuineness of their case and the discretion of the latter. In fact among the refugees, the resettlement process is not one to be treated lightly. Special lessons are actually offered in which prospective interviewees are schooled. This is to enable them know what and what not to say, how to harmonise their stories so it is acceptable enough to the authorities to earn them the much sought-after place(s). The resettled respondent had this to say about her efforts at sharing her success with her compatriots to enable them make it:

“If the people come to interview you and you are not confused and you explain exactly what is on the document, they will let you go in. But some people will go, they writing

different thing here then when they ask them question, they say different thing. So I'm encouraging them now, I say if you really fill in your form, you have to attack it. Go look over it, study it with your family. It may come the day your name will appear on the board, when they call you for interview, so you can be able to say exactly what you have on your document. I'm telling them this because, the last time they put up names, some people had gone to Liberia, and they were not even here, you see. That's why I'm going myself to encourage people, let's see by the end of this year". (C. C.)

In their efforts to get on the programme at all cost, the refugees sometimes lie, but feel justified in doing so. This, in their view, is the only way they can beat a system which seems to encourage lies in order to be eligible for resettlement¹³⁴. Dick (2002) asserts; "Just as they were required to be "exemplary victims" in order to access aid, so they must now cast themselves as "exemplary victims" once again, in order to access resettlement". She (ibid.), however, concedes that some have exploited the resettlement programme for their own profit. Indeed some have been known to resort to selling places at exorbitant prices to others who are not even Liberian. In fact it is common knowledge that some Ghanaians and other nationals buy places on the affidavit of relationship for P3 family reunification resettlement. As is often the case than not, applications are rejected and these fail to go through. The refugees end up in debt as they have to reimburse the amounts collected but this does not appear to be a deterrent. Yet others pay for a place in the hopes of being helped to make it, but never realise the dream. They are thus left frustrated. For the refugees, however, resettlement is worth all the trouble for the prospects they perceive it to offer. This is especially so as one never knows when the deal may click! Persistent then, they say, is well worth the effort.

8.5 Conclusion - "Home is where you make it"¹³⁵

All said, refugees plan for multiple futures in addressing the issue of durable solutions. As Zetter (1999) suggests, more than considering the different strategies as discontinuities, an approach that seeks to bridge the various solutions will be more proactive. This, he indicates, is especially the case for integration and return. Whilst trying to maintain the status quo for the benefits this might confer on them, refugees also plan ahead for a time when they may be able to settle back in their country of origin. In the meantime, however, home is where they make it. This is consonant with Brun's (2003:267) assertion that "displacement ends when refugees have found a place in society: a place where they can live and *make a life*" (Researcher's emphasis). It is the place where they are able to satisfy their needs and not necessarily their place of origin without which life cannot be complete. This is opposed to the static idea of home as a place of nostalgia to which they must necessarily return if life is to

return to normal. Dick (2002) suggests that given the chance, Liberians would even prefer to make a Liberian enclave of the camp. This would serve the double purpose of neither having to integrate into the Ghanaian society nor returning to a Liberia, which they still consider to be unsafe.

Even though resettlement places seem to be increasing for Liberian refugees each year, the reality seems to favour alternatives other than sole reliance on resettlement. In view of the attitude of the authorities and the refugees themselves towards integration, it does not appear to be a reliable alternative either. Whilst return is preferred by the authorities, the majority of refugees, for whom it is meant, are unwilling to take advantage of it. Various reasons and justifications have been advanced by both sides as to their respective positions, all of which are noteworthy. This presents a dilemma that is not easily solved, given that refugees' views *should* (researcher's own emphasis) be wedded to the programmes and practices concerning their welfare. An intransigent stand in these matters, however, does more harm than good to all parties involved. I suggest a compromise on the part of all stakeholders. This includes organizations involved in implementing the so-called durable solutions, the refugees and the resettlement host countries in collaborating to find workable solutions to the refugee problem. The solutions are admittedly not easy to come by. In the spirit of consultativeness, I would like to engage the reader's reflections. Which options, in your view, are realistically practical in favouring both the refugees and the organizations concerned? I will proceed with some concluding remarks and suggestions as to the way forward.

Chapter 9: Conclusion and Suggestions

9.1 Overview of Chapters

This thesis has employed the pre-flight and after-flight narratives of Liberian refugee women and children to enable an understanding of the ways in which they are coping with their protracted displacement in the Gomoa-Budumburam Refugee Camp in Ghana. Narratives collected covered much of their life course but emphasis has been on the post-flight ones as they reflect their life in the camp. The situation faced by men, and indeed any other refugee, is no less challenging but has not been the focus of the present study. Focusing on women and children has helped highlight some challenges faced by this group. They are apparently in the majority but in many ways marginalised in the situation in which they find themselves.

Recognising refugees as “agents of change” capable of reproducing social rules and transforming the empirical world, the need has been identified to hear their voice as to the problems and solutions they consider viable in their situation. A qualitative methodological approach has thus been employed. The emphasis has been on recounting their narratives mainly through life history accounts. Active observation, informal conversations and other methods were also employed during a six-week stay on the camp. An illustrative sampling method coupled with the flexibility so characteristic of the chosen methodology, has helped deal with a smaller number of respondents and to ‘dance’ between methodology, theory and analysis to produce a coherent whole. Keeping the sample size small has enabled me to give attention to much detail. This has also helped ‘to say it’ as much in their own words as possible without essentialising their voices as if theirs was the only views that mattered. I would hesitate to claim representativeness of their views and thus a generalisation of the analysis and subsequent results to the whole population. It has however revealed important insights as to the ingenious mechanisms employed as a means of coping with an otherwise difficult situation. It has also revealed some nuances in their perceptions with respect to the so-called durable solutions. It has hopefully brought to the fore, some solutions they consider to be applicable in their situation. If I could do it again over a longer period and with less page restrictions, I would listen to, tell more of their stories and in greater detail than I have been able to do presently.

Actor-oriented theories have been helpful in understanding the ways in which they deal with their situation. The concept of agency has been particularly useful as an analytical tool in bringing to the fore, their voices as to the ways in which they innovatively manage. Whilst not downplaying the constraining effects and the accompanying limbo of protracted displacement on their lives, it has been established that resourcefulness and ingenuity rather than passivity, best characterise the ways in which they have managed their situation. Though some have resorted to what has been termed negative coping mechanisms, the majority have and actively seek positive ways of coping. NGOs/CBOs, almost all of which are remarkably run by Liberians, have been noted to be very instrumental in addressing various needs. Drawing on a space/place concept, a deconstructionist idea of place has been highlighted. The taken-for-granted but contested idea of home as a return to one's place of origin, without which life is incomplete, has been questioned. A more pragmatic view of home as "where one makes it" has been suggested instead (see Chapter 3). Seen from this perspective, the refugees' claim to the multiple solutions of resettlement presently (for the opportunities it appears to offer), and a possible return in the long run, is more understandable (See Chapter 8).

Specifically, this study has explored the livelihood strategies they employ as means of coping. Several strategies have been considered and the security concerns highlighted as to the ways in which it helps and/or restrains coping. Whilst threats to physical security seem to be greatly reduced due to the combined presence of the police and the NWT, the same cannot be said for their intangible security concerns. Women and the youth have been revealed to be particularly vulnerable to abuses of various kinds. Though problematised but given their potential to contribute positively and/or negatively to the stability of camp life, the challenges peculiar to the youth or "camp children" have been discussed (See Chapter 6). In chapter 7, the role of education (both formal and informal) as an important tool for developing the skills needed to be self-reliant and as a long-term coping mechanism has been explored. This reveals that with few exceptions, most refugees do recognise the need for having some form of education. The prospects available as well as the challenges in accessing it, especially among the women and youth, have thus been considered. Whilst concerted efforts are being made by the UNHCR and the CEB to ensure education for all, the reality bespeaks of many being unable to access it mainly as a result of financial incapability. Other concerns are the high dropout among girls due to teenage pregnancy, negative peer pressure and what has been called the "resettlement syndrome", among others. The important role of skill training programmes in providing some

practical skills in various areas has also been examined. Whilst some have benefited, the geographies of control over access and/or fuller participation, if any at all, has been revealed to be unequal in various instances.

In line with the 2004 World Refugee day's call for a return 'home' in dignity and safety, chapter 8, explores the refugees' perceptions about the three proposed solutions and their assessment of the options they perceive to be available to them. Given the policy preference for return or reintegration as the most durable solutions to the refugee problem, the nuances in their perceptions as to the reasons informing their choice of one solution over the other have been examined. Resettlement, it has been revealed, is by far their most preferred option even if the least accessible. Reintegration appears for the moment to be neither preferred by the host government nor the refugees though no immediate plans are on board to dissolve the camp now or in the near future. Return or VR is on-going with refugees supposedly given the right of choice. The clear indications however are that it is the policy and donor community favourite. Some have taken advantage of it whilst the majority prefer to keep a foothold in the camp and maintain the status quo in the hopes of accessing any advantages accruing to that.

To enable a contextual understanding of some policy issues affecting the refugees in their protracted displacement, Chapter 5 deals with the structures and services in place. This explores the ways in which they either act to enable and/or constrain the refugees as they strive to cope. Prominent among these are the Ghana Government acting through the GRB and its extended arm, the Camp Management; the UNHCR, its sister organisations and local implementing partners; the LRWC as well as some NGOs/CBOs. The two former, in their role as protectors, so-to-speak, of refugee interests, purport to provide a range of services for the refugees. The government has expressed its preoccupation with the provision of security mainly through the police and the NWT and the welcoming hosting climate that has enabled the refugees to remain till date. Jobs are also theoretically available though the reality is not as simple. Beyond this, it calls on the UNHCR and other International Organisations to provide the needed assistance. That the former has been instrumental in the lives of the refugees can be seen from the difficulties their withdrawal decision imposed on them and the 'father' figure it is assigned, especially after its return in 2002. This recognition, whilst beneficial, has been revealed to tend towards being patronising; especially where refugees' views are not solicited in programme implementation and execution. The support given to the refugee

leadership body is however a step in the right direction. The dedicated service rendered by its members is worth commending, as is the case with all the other organisations. It has a real potential for articulating representative views of the entire population by consulting these in its decision-making processes and refraining from being self-serving. A measure of autonomy then is required on its part if it is to fulfil its mission successfully.

From the foregoing discussion, we have established that the refugee problem is indeed a canker in historical and contemporary human life. Though the overall numbers are said to be decreasing, we know that many are still faced with this predicament and its consequences thereof. Certainly, the individual experiences of those who have to grapple with this situation cannot be couched in aggregate terms. This is especially so when displacement has been protracted as is the case with Liberian refugees in Ghana. Whilst the “limbness” and frustrations so characteristic of this displacement is common to all categories of persons, it has been established that women and children are most affected. Though in the majority and saddled with numerous responsibilities, they are also known to be most vulnerable and limited in their access to various services. From all indications however, they have shown a willingness to engage in the process of rebuilding their lives and assigning it meaning. This is evident in the numerous innovative ways in which many strive to provide a decent livelihood not only for themselves, but for the household and the community as a whole.

9.2 Suggestions

Various suggestions were put forward by the refugees and the organisations involved in their lives. Some of these are highlighted here as a means of suggesting a way forward. The researcher’s suggestions are also expressed.

In my opinion, there is a need to involve women in all levels of decision-making involving their own welfare and that of the whole community’s. Though women’s participation in the camp’s affairs has been commended, there is a need of enabling more to be actively involved in going beyond providing sustenance to long-ranging programmes. The enthusiasm with which many embrace programmes designed at redressing illiteracy are all indications of their willingness to better their lives. There is then a need to design these in a way that will benefit a wider range of women at all levels of the social ladder. This, in some cases, will require

implementing programmes specially designed to address the needs of women who were unable to obtain education from their country of origin. Skill training programmes should thus take into account these differentials in qualification. The design and content should then be such that they are accessible to women at different levels and at best, correspond to the varied needs of those enrolled. The need for some form of empowerment after skills training was articulated. The importance of micro-finance projects as a support in employing skills acquired and a source of income is thus vital. In this way, women may consider it worthwhile leaving their short-term livelihood pursuits without thinking that their means of sustenance is completely curtailed. There is however a need for this to be done in a way that ensures sustainability. Refugees have a responsibility here to use their loans in productive ventures to enable them pay back. This will encourage a revolving system thus affording yet others the opportunity to benefit from it.

An area of great concern is the treatment of SGBV. The hushed way of dealing with the existence of this on the part of persons in authority is rather disturbing. History needs not repeat itself before emergency solutions are found as the damage would have already been done. Indeed the lack of reporting points to the dire need for more proactive and effective protection measures that encourage victims to report without fear of any future reprisals. If it is anything to go by, the inefficiency of the SGBV group in dispensing of its duties is in itself reason enough to give special attention to this area. It is indeed a vital aspect of the protection of women and especially girls if any claims can be made as to their protection concerns being addressed. The underlying causes leading to exploitation must themselves be addressed. At the same time, the specific duty and ability to curb abuses by employees must be acknowledged. It is thus of vital importance to include frequent consultation and involvement of all refugee community stakeholders, especially women and children, in programme development, training and raising awareness of rights and entitlements (Naik 2002). It is also vital for proper channels of complaint to be established. Perpetrators should be dealt with decisively in a way as to serve as a deterrent to others doing so or contemplating it. Special training for the police and security personnel involved in refugee issues is necessary in enabling them understand the ways in which to deal with such cases without being implicated in it themselves. In recent years, the International community has shown a high level of commitment in addressing this concern. Obviously, there is no lack of will on the part of the agencies to deal with this problem on the camp. The presence of such organisations like

WISE and possibly WAJU are welcome. However, clear priorities and mechanisms for identifying and addressing SGBV are needed. Policies also need to get off the drawing board and be turned into action on the ground. This will hopefully ensure that the vulnerabilities of women and girls are dealt with holistically and they are given the necessary protection in all aspects of their lives.

There is also a need for establishing long-term solutions to the protracted and often forgotten refugee situation. The suggestion to address the causes of war at its root still stands very valid. In the interim however, the UNHCR is primarily mandated with the responsibility to protect and vigorously promote durable solutions to the refugee problem. As with any human institution, there is admittedly a limit to what they can do in achieving this all-encompassing goal. There is thus a need for getting all onboard. Donor communities cannot let down their hands at this stage and all other agencies, both governmental and non-governmental, need to pitch in their efforts. Their contributions must be sustained in addressing the problems and providing developmental projects that benefit both refugees and host communities. This can ensure peaceful coexistence between these and provide the conducive environment needed for the sustained success of such programmes.

The host government has demonstrated remarkable hospitality in ensuring safety, free movement and other services for the refugees. Yet, much more needs to be done if long-term solutions can be found and if the self-reliance on the part of the refugees needed to ease the burden of supporting them can be achieved. The need for facilitating their access to jobs has especially been identified. Whilst generally difficult for all sections of the Ghanaian community, efforts at addressing this on the part of the government will indeed be worthwhile and highly appreciated. It will then go a long way in reducing the idleness that is so harmful to the fragile but much cherished peace of the host country. There is also a need to educate the host citizens of the refugees' usefulness in contributing to the economy of the country. Meeting points and activities involving both sides could be good in breaking down some of the deeply entrenched prejudices that inhibit integration. On the part of the refugees, creating an enclave in the camp and refusing to mingle is also not the most effective way of breaking the impasse, so to speak. Generally, it is a good principle for all to remember that anybody could become a refugee thus the need for "doing unto others what you want others to do to you".

Whilst efforts are being made to address the educational needs of the refugees, the indications are that opportunities are still limited for many. The cooperation of all is needed if the problem can be solved. Parents have the responsibility to ensure that their children are able to access this most vital resource. Children also need to realise the need for availing themselves of this opportunity and exerting themselves to make it under the restraining conditions they may find themselves in. Succumbing to peer pressure or sacrificing one's education for the mirage of being resettled is definitely not the way out! They however need the financial support necessary to enable them make it. Currently, the DAFI programme appears to be the only scholarship available for refugee students at the tertiary level. Places are however very limited as to the actual numbers actually benefiting from it. More such opportunities are a concrete way in which donor countries/agencies could help provide long-term solutions and thus deal with the refugee problem. The need has also been expressed for moral education as well as stepping up the Reproductive Health and Awareness of Preventive Measures programme. The training programme for teen mothers is definitely a step in the right direction. It however needs to be revisited so that it starts functioning in ways that will benefit them. It should also be made possible for their children to be catered to whilst they receive an education and/or a skill. This will enable them be self-reliant and protect them from reliance on abusive relationships. They will then be in a better position to care not only for themselves but for their children now and in the future.

There is no doubt that the organisations in place are contributing in very important ways to address the needs of the refugees. Without a doubt, their dedicated efforts are commendable and most of their services are indeed necessary. In doing so, however, caution must be exercised so as not to burden the very people to whom programmes are targeted. There is also a need for programmes ensuring transparency and accountability on the part of all organisations involved. This would help strengthen refugees' confidence and subsequent engagement in their activities; something that is vital if these programmes are to succeed. The importance of adopting a bottom-up approach, through regular consultations with the refugees about their real and/or perceived needs, cannot be over-emphasised.

Whilst they did indeed display resourcefulness in dealing with the withdrawal of UNHCR's assistance, the evidence suggests that this took a heavy toll on the already-overstretched infrastructure and subsequently on their lives. On its return, this has necessitated taking on a

lot more than would probably have been the case had it not withdrawn completely. The assertion that “the most effective programme for facilitating self-reliance appears to be the termination of care and maintenance programmes” cannot be sustained (Dick 2002). Whilst not advocating for UNHCR’s continued provision of care and maintenance or that “it takes on all the problems of African underdevelopment” (ibid. 2002), the fact remains that UNHCR’s presence and continued input in providing basic services, especially to the needy and oft-overlooked residents, is still very vital. Though it does not need to be “blanketing” in doing so, complete withdrawal is definitely not the solution either as has been amply demonstrated in the short period of its return to the camp. The current focus on community projects are to be commended as it encourages refugee initiative-taking whilst providing the support needed for them to make things work. Caution must however be exercised so that the needs of individuals are not sacrificed at the expense of the community’s. Effective monitoring and evaluation of assigned projects are thus necessary to counter the possible appropriation of resources into individual coffers at the expense of the group.

Finding durable solutions to the refugee problem has indeed revealed itself to be problematic and a great challenge to all involved. Refugees must indeed be an integral part of the decision-making process if successful solutions are to be found. The contribution of resettlement hosting nations in providing ‘a place to call home’ to many women and children at risk are indeed commendable. There is however a call for them to increase the quota places if possible as it helps regulate the tendency of some finding illegal channels of entering anyway. The cost of tracking these down proves more costly than finding an effective way of solving the problem through the right channel once and for all. For repatriation programmes to be effective, all necessary measures must be taken to ensure that refugees and IDP populations have the conducive environment and the level of security needed to make them stay and engage in the process of rebuilding their lives. Fact-finding missions and the involvement of the refugee community in all steps of the process, from start to finish, are indeed necessary if they are to feel a part of it. After all, their full cooperation is required if such programmes are to remain voluntary and work effectively in providing solutions. Integration programmes have also proven successful in cases where long-range developmental projects benefiting both hosts and refugees have been the focus.

All said, I personally look forward to the time when: “Nations will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning shears. When nation will not lift up sword against nation, neither will they learn war anymore”.¹³⁶ This way, the refugee problem will be curbed at its very source. Until then, all hands must be pitched in and contribute either by way of tolerance, hospitality, understanding, education, policy translated into action and the sheer will needed to treat refugees as worthy of all the respect and dignity due a fellow human being.

Endnotes

¹ Slight indiscrepancy here as the present camp administration gives a number of refugee who initially arrived as 30 - Interview, Camp Management, 9/7/2004

² The regional definition adopted by Latin America is the Cartagena Declaration which recommends a definition very similar to the OAU Convention (see Chimni B.S. 2000)

³ See further discussion of Refugee Status determination in chapter 5

⁴ It has been suggested by various authors that these election were by no means democratic but at least Taylor won and gained the legitimate access to the presidency he had fought for all the while. This seemed to suggest that the war would be over as he was installed and satiated. The facts proved otherwise.

⁵ It had all interests in getting the refugees back home then since they were never meant to have come to stay for good. A fact especially reinforced by their having been granted prima-facie status.

⁶ Not only are the naturalisation rules not easy to follow and its acquisition difficult, but to do so would mean that the refugees could no longer enjoy refugee status, which they were not even granted in the first place, but would basically have to survive on their own.

⁷ Interview, UNHCR, 2004

⁸ According to the “Districts in Ghana as of October 1999” chart, the Central region has 12 districts, including Awutu-Afutu-Senya and Gomua with Winneba and Apam as the district capitals respectively (GRi 1994-2000). It must however be stated that the district boundaries are subject to changes as they can be reduced or enlarged to suit particular needs. In the case of the refugees, there is a rather fluid use of the various districts depending on the need at any particular point in time. It is also not uncommon for them to make frequent use of Kasoa, a town in The Greater Accra Region apparently because of its proximity and easy transport linkage to the capital, Accra. In view of these facts coupled with the paucity of information on the district, I have just provided the locational information of the camp in relation to the region and district in which it is found and not specific information on the district itself unless where relevant.

⁹ Interview – Camp Management 9/07/2004; Dick 2002

¹⁰ Informal conversation/Life history interview 21/6/04, 2/8/04

¹¹ Interview – Camp Management 9/07/2004

¹² The rest of the youth above 17 years are accounted for within the ranks of women and men between the ages of 18-59. It is thus difficult to tell exactly how many of these there actually are. The CMt (2004) indicates that adolescents and youth are considered to be under 18 years of age. It however adds that there are often no fixed ages to describe “youth” or “adolescent” as other factors more than age also determine who a child, an adolescent or an adult is.

¹³ In the course of the interview, it was indicated that the rate of reuniting unaccompanied/separated children with their parents or family was just ok (less than 50%), but considering it on an individual basis, the informant asserts, it is still nice to see that some have been reunited with their families in the first place. A recent example was cited where 13 children had been joined with their parents - Interview, UNHCR – 10/8/2004

¹⁴ This term is used on the camp to refer to young ones giving birth to one or several children, often by different fathers, at the age of about 12 years onwards when they are still considered to be “babies” themselves in need of care. A 2003 survey recorded over 2,670 teenage mothers between the ages of 13-25. This figure however reflects only those who registered for this preliminary exercise to help shortlist some teenage mothers for a skill training programme; the actual numbers are a lot more than this - Key Interview, Coordinator of Women and Children’s Affairs of LRWC

¹⁵ The “Gap” is a place on the camp famous for “hosting” young drug abusers, an equivalent of the “Bronx” in the USA as someone observed. An unaccompanied youth who had broken free of his drug habit said of his drug abuse days: “I spent a lot of time with friends in the gap. I used to wash clothes for people to survive. Drugs made me strong to be able to wash a lot of clothes for people so I could get more money”. (F.G.D, 3/4/04)

¹⁶ In an interview with the head of the Women’s Auxiliary, NWT, she expressed concern about the lack of youth training centres as a means of discouraging idleness and other vices among the youth.

¹⁷ Interview, UNCHR 10/8/2004

¹⁸ Interview- GRB 25/6/04; Ghana, PNDC Law 305 D, Part II, Establishment of the Ghana Refugee Board; Dick 2002

¹⁹ Interview – GRB 25/6/04

²⁰ Each zonal head is assisted by a secretary and some members – Interview, Co-Chair Administration 5/7/04.

²¹ GRB Interview, Accra 25/6/04

²² Interview, the Camp 9/7/04; Field Observations by researcher

²³ On the part of the government, integration could relatively confer “insider-ness” though the degree to which one integrates will depend as much on the individual as it does on the opportunities for doing so.

²⁴ See discussion of women/children/men ratio in the background chapter.

²⁵ Valentine (2001:46 in Limb and Dwyer 2001) notes: “qualitative researchers usually employ... illustrative sampling rather than random sampling techniques, which are concerned with selecting a representative sample of a population by use of questionnaires”. I thus consider it appropriate as I am not overly concerned about the representativeness of my population and/or the replicability of the results obtained to a larger group.

²⁶ This is Crush and Miles’ synopsis of the views of various authors in different disciplines as to the advantages of the personal narrative method. Its use has been pioneered mainly in anthropology, sociology and history. In their research on “Collecting and Interpreting Migrant life-histories”, they drew on these views to demonstrate its usefulness in Geography. I borrow from them.

²⁷ The man was deeply moved and would have cried but for the cultural impediments that denies men access to tears especially in front of a younger female.

²⁸ The exception here was the skilled person who had actually been there since 1999.

²⁹ Commenting on the selection of respondents for qualitative research he (1988:17) asserts: “the first principle is, “less is more”. He adds: “it is more important to work longer, and with greater care, with a few people than more superficially with many of them”. He suggests that for many research projects, eight respondents will be perfectly sufficient, claiming that many quantitatively trained social scientists will reel at the “thought of so small a “sample”. I obtained the life histories of an even lesser number (5), not to shock, but for the reasons outlined above.

³⁰ In one particular instance, the respondent asked me to stop the tape midway so she could find out what benefits would accrue from our interview. To this I replied: “none”, but assured her that her life experience as she was relating it, was very courageous and one that deserved to be heard for its own sake. We had established a good rapport leading to the interview; she happened to like Ghanaians and the fact that I was a lady conducting the research. She was pretty fascinated with the camera I had entrusted her with. She had no problem continuing with our discussion. Seeing me around talking to various people including their well-respected officials did not hurt. I also made it a point to greet them whenever I was in their locality, buying from some, stopping for a small chat when possible.

³¹ The Inspector-in-charge did assign some other female officials to talk to me, one of whom happened to be an inspector herself. It was however difficult to speak to her in particular, as she seemed to be liaising between the Camp Police Post and the District Police Station at Kasoa. In her absence however, the other female officers refused to speak since they were her subordinates and nothing could move them from this non-compliant stance.

³² I’m unable, in the present work, to explore the work of all the institutions involved in the lives of the refugees. This is strictly due to space constraints and does not suggest that their intervention is any less important.

³³ See the “Administration on the Camp” section in chapter 2 for further details.

³⁴ Interview, GRB 25/6/04

³⁵ The OAU Convention governing the specific aspects of Refugee problems in Africa serves to address the causes of mass refugee influxes, including war-induced displacement as is the case with Liberian refugees in Ghana, thus ensuring that these generally benefit from refugee protection. To qualify for individual status and subsequently for resettlement, however, one has to establish that their “fear is well-founded”, implicitly making them subject to the ’51 convention and its ’67 protocol – a rare privilege for a select minority from Africa.

³⁶ Hyndman (2000:25) rightly observes: “There is increasingly a two-tier system in which fewer and fewer refugees meet the criteria for full convention refugee status. Convention status has been displaced by the discretionary group designation of prima-facie refugees, whose movements and entitlements are much more restricted.

³⁷ Interview, GRB, 25/6/04

³⁸ Even though the process was supposedly started in 1998/99, it was said not to have reached the camp. It was only in 2003 that the UNHCR and the GRB completed the first phase of a so-called Comprehensive registration and documentation exercise for all asylum seekers and refugees in cooperation with the Ghana Immigration Service and the refugees themselves. During 2004, a more detailed second phase was said to be in progress which would help UNHCR build its database and give a more accurate profile of each individual refugee-Interview, GRB, 25/6/04; UNHCR-Ghana: Profile (2004).

³⁹ To facilitate the process and cover the large camp area, the whole registration team was present and card distribution done in serial numbers. According to the UNHCR, some missed out on their assigned days, still others missed out on all opportunities because people move in and out a lot and some live in areas outside the camp. Others were just not bothered whilst others could have traveled and were thus not present at the time – Interview, UNHCR

⁴⁰ For instance the UNHCR indicates that some could not receive their cards due to technical errors whilst there are over 3000 cards which have still not been collected by the refugees. They assert that announcements were made through the media, on the notice boards in the camp and other places so the excuse advanced by some refugees that they did not hear about the exercise cannot hold.

⁴¹ Generally jobs are unavailable in Ghana and there are restrictions as to where one can work as access to certain areas like the military, police service, are not allowed for security reasons. Many other reasons are however advanced for the lack of jobs among which is the claim that refugees think they should not work; Ghanaians are ignorant of the laws and think Liberians should just sit in the camp like the refugees they are; Many human resource managers unaware that refugees can work; and all these in spite of the fact that refugees *are* (author's emphasis) allowed to engage in all kinds of work as far as it is not illegal or immoral- Interview, UNHCR, GRB

⁴² These work in the capacity of Settlement Manager; Administrative Assistant to the Manager, Utility Officer and Transport Officer respectively, assigned from NADMO and the NMP – Interview, Camp Management 9/7/04

⁴³ The Management lets out X-marked houses to the vulnerable but admits that preventing the refugees from renting out houses to others, at a price, is very difficult – Interview, Settlement Manager

⁴⁴ There are apparently plans to set up two police posts within the camp to facilitate access without having to go all the way to the police station at the entrance of the camp. There are also plans to expand the police station with UNHCR assisting with infrastructure, but land appears not to be available – Interviews: GRB, UNHCR

⁴⁵ Commenting on this, the head of the team indicated that the camp was a “no-go” area rife with criminals. Crimes included stabbings, rapes, robberies, etc. The crime rates are said to have soared from 2001-2002 culminating in a climax on August 28, 2002 when a young Ghanaian camp resident was shot to death in front of the 18. This, according to him, occasioned the formation of the vigilante group which is now the NWT.

⁴⁶ In August 2002, some team members were provided training in fire drills to enable them strengthen the capacity of the limited number (3) of fire service personnel on the camp – Researcher's Field notes.

⁴⁷ A profile of the team members revealed that it comprised of ex-police officers, teachers, tailors, mechanics, medical practitioners, builders, electricians, wives and mothers- Interview- Head of NWT

⁴⁸ Interview – Head of NWT and Head of Female Auxiliary respectively

⁴⁹ The women work fewer hours to enable them care for other family responsibilities (Interview- Head of NWT).

⁵⁰ The NWT was the only institution of which the camp residents were almost unanimous in their assessment as an effective and useful outfit which has really contributed to their sense of being physically safe. One woman expressed it thus: “Thanks to the NWT, now I can sleep with all my windows open without fearing that somebody will stab me” B.B.

⁵¹ Since UNHCR's operations ceased in 2000, the actual number of returnees is hard to tell especially as these were not captured by their data – Interview, UNHCR

⁵² On the 22nd of September 2004, the UNHCR in collaboration with the government; the National Transitional Government of Liberia and the IOM signed a tripartite agreement to set the legal framework for the VR exercise – Thomas Albrecht, UNHCR-Ghana Representative cited in Ghana News Agency (GNA 2004)

⁵³ Writing on the plight of the world's refugees, Francois Jean (1997:50,51) notes: “...The UNHCR has somewhat abandoned the question of free choice and the rule of profound and lasting change in favour of a vague notion of safe return or a return in dignity and safety. To replace the notion of VR with that of safe return is to replace the refugee's individual judgement with the discretion of the UNHCR or other states involved. This overruling of the will of refugees is all the more disquieting in that it increases the risk of pressure” (cited in Chimni B.S. 2000: 337 footnote 16).

⁵⁴ As at the time of this interview, the document on Returnee Assistance package tentatively included Non-food items; Shelter kits – individual and group tents for temporary accommodation; Agricultural tools for those interested in farming and Community-based assistance like water provision for very rural areas

⁵⁵ The UNHCR claims to be progressively doing a lot of peace education through workshops particularly targeted at school administrators in their capacity of tutoring the youth and thus being able to form them in some way. The effectiveness and the extent to which this is actually reaching those for whom it is meant, remains to be seen.

⁵⁶ See more detailed discussion of this in chapter 7, section 7.3.

⁵⁷ “In the situation of large-scale influx, asylum seekers should be admitted to the state in which they first seek refuge ...in all cases, the fundamental principle of non-refoulement (non-return to country of origin) – including non-rejection at the frontier- must be scrupulously observed”. Conclusion No. 22 adopted by the Executive Committee of the UNHCR (1981) in the context of “protection of asylum seekers in situations of large-scale influx” (Cited in Chimni B.S., 2000:86)

⁵⁸ P1- includes former political prisoners, women at risk, victims of torture or violence, physically or mentally disabled persons, persons in urgent need of medical treatment not available in the first asylum country, and persons for whom other durable solutions are not feasible and whose status in the place of asylum does not offer a satisfactory long-term solution. P2-groups of special humanitarian concern; P3- Refugee family reunions <http://new.churchworldservice.org/ope-accra/eligible.html#visas>

⁵⁹ Interview, Camp Management, 9/07/2004

⁶⁰ Ghanaians and other nationals have been known to buy spaces on the affidavit at exorbitant prices from the refugees and in concert with some officials sometimes (Dick S. 2002).

⁶¹ This started with cooked food which was later replaced with non-cooked items like sardines, cooking oil, rice, etc. Non-food items like blankets, buckets, plates, cups, cutlery, soap, charcoal were also provided – Interviews, Camp Management, Refugees

⁶² The aged, disabled, malnourished children and unaccompanied minors are a few who benefited from this programme.

⁶³ According to the UNHCR, the same was done in all asylum countries in the sub-region. It has however been suggested that the international attention shifted to the Eastern European conflict in Bosnia which has always been of much more concern to the West than the numerous conflicts in Africa- Interview, UNHCR, Camp Management

⁶⁴ In 2003, UNHCR-Ghana, the GRB in cooperation with the Ghana Immigration Service and the refugees themselves, completed the first phase of what it calls a comprehensive registration and documentation exercise for all asylum seekers and refugees. Currently (2004), the second phase, which is the documentation stage, is still in progress – UNHCR-Ghana: A Profile, April 2004, UNHCR Accra.

⁶⁵ According to the Chairman of the CEB, a survey conducted in September 2003 showed that about 4000 people of school-going age had dropped out or had not at all been in school. Of these, 2,321 came forward to be registered, 800 of whom have been enrolled in various schools. This 2,321 corresponds with UNHCR's survey figure of approximately 2,500 children between the ages of 4 and 17 who were not in school for various reasons, but mainly due to financial constraints. It is worth noting that these figures are not representative of the entire child/youth population who are out of school as some participated, neither in the documentation nor the survey.

⁶⁶ Of the 38 schools, 24 are primary with an enrollment of about 7,830; 14 are JSS with a total enrollment of about 4,738 and 3 are SSS with an enrollment of about 3100 – Interview, Chairman of CEB 30/7/2004

⁶⁷ He indicated that there could be as many as 200 students! in one class – Interview, Headmaster for SSS section of BUDUSEC, 3/4/04

⁶⁸ See Chapter 7 for a discussion of some reasons for this trend.

⁶⁹ The UNHCR cited incidents during the registration where parents were expecting free handouts. They supposedly withdrew their children from school saying these had not been in school in a long time even though the schools had records on their wards. It indicates that needy ones will thus be assessed by the social counselor and offered assistance as appropriate. This, it claims, is to enable them channel some resources to other areas of concern – Interview, UNHCR-Ghana 10/8/2004

⁷⁰ During the course of research, a bucket was sold between 100 to 200 cedis depending on the size of the bucket.

⁷¹ The researcher observed refugees drawing water from two ponds, one of which is located at the “gulf” and the other close to a rubbish dump in the village.

⁷² After a current cost assessment however, the government indicated that a realistic project could not be envisaged within its current budgetary provisions – UNHCR – Ghana: A Profile, April 2004

⁷³ Dick S. (2002) suggests that this might be a pre-war practice of ill-maintained public property which has been transferred to the camp.

⁷⁴ Adults are charged 200 cedis for use of these facilities whilst children under twelve and the aged of 60 plus are exempted from paying. Public Bath houses have also been provided and zonal heads asked to organize community clean-ups. Supplies are provided through the user fees from the toilet facilities. Dislodging of the latter are supported by UNHCR through the Catholic Secretariat, the implementing partner in charge of Health and Sanitation – Chairman of Sanitation Board, 16/7/04

⁷⁵ Apart from the apparent health hazard this practice poses, women and girls are particularly susceptible to rapes at the gulf which is not illuminated.

⁷⁶ This has been referred to as an open secret with some suggesting that the women are willing accomplices. They however admit that these may be forced by circumstances to do so. No matter the reason however, capitalizing on one's position to gain sexual favours is not only unacceptable, but an abuse of the rights of the women involved.

⁷⁷ The exact figures are hard to come by but it is estimated that over 60% of the refugee population are women and Children – Coordinator of Women and Children's Affairs Committee, 19/7/04

⁷⁸ Whilst this number gives a picture of the situation, its representativeness cannot be ascertained as some do not avail themselves of the registration exercise.

⁷⁹ This request has been reproduced here because it was re-echoed by many others involved with the lives of girls on the camp (Interviews with Coordinator of Women and Children's Affairs Committee, LRWC; Head of Women's Auxiliary of NWT and the Social Welfare Officer) and seemed to be an urgent need requiring immediate attention.

⁸⁰ During the period of my fieldwork, one US dollar (1\$) was exchanged for 8, 600 cedis.

⁸¹ The present study focuses briefly on the period before and more extensively on the period after flight. The emphasis is especially on their lives during their protracted displacement on the camp.

⁸² See Dick, S. (2002), for some of the factor shaping their lives and some suggested reasons that led to the war.

⁸³ For ethical concerns, letters have been used instead of real names. This is to ensure confidentiality and to protect some who were not comfortable with the mention of their names.

⁸⁴ The cent is the lowest denomination of the Liberian currency. This is thus a way of saying: "I don't have anything!".

⁸⁵ See Riak (2004) for a parallel discussion of the burden and stress caused by remitting to kin and friends among the Dinka of Sudan in the Diaspora.

⁸⁶ Western Union is the money transfer service provider mainly used by the refugees to receive remittances from abroad.

⁸⁷ Though I did not directly collect information on this, it was very easy to observe the importance of religion to the refugees. In an informal conversation with the chairman of the LRWC and the Head of the Council of Churches on the Camp, they suggested that there were more than 50 registered churches, not counting the other smaller groups meeting in homes and other places.

⁸⁸ Dick (2002) gives an incisive account as to the how and why of churches on the camp, the reasons for active interest in it and some church organisations that have been involved in relief work.

⁸⁹ Referring to smallest unit of Liberian money

⁹⁰ IMO official in charge of the orientation of UNHCR-resettled refugees to Norway with whose kind permission I was able to access this group and interact with them. We had many fruitful informal conversations.

⁹¹ Interview with Camp Management Official, 9/7/04

⁹² This market located on the Broad Street (itself concentrated with a lot of shops) bustles with trading activities far into the night serving the throngs of young and old alike as remittances are expended on roasted fish, meat, chicken pieces and other items - Active observation during fieldwork.

⁹³ This is quite profitable as clean drinking water is hard to come by on the camp and many rely on this so-called "pure" or mineral water.

⁹⁴ This is granulated cassava flour that can be eaten with various accompaniments. It is versatile and affordable.

⁹⁵ This is the central market in Accra.

⁹⁶ Market measurement used in Ghana for dry commodities approximately equivalent to 1.5 kg.

⁹⁷ She spoke about "security from being in your house and somebody attacking you" and "security in the sense that you are vulnerable". This is interestingly how many women on the camp perceived security.

⁹⁸ He may be implicitly referring to passengers on the "Bulk challenge" ship. Many of these were said to be rebels and who were eventually accepted in Ghana.

⁹⁹ In the course of an interview, a respondent reacted very strongly to the loud crying of a child. Asked as to why this was so, she indicated that the noise reminded her of shooting in Liberia and she was still very jittery about anything that had to do with the security forces. This she indicated brought back memories and as a result, nightmares – Observation/ Interview, 2/8/04

¹⁰⁰ Referring to men's abuse of women

¹⁰¹ There seemed to a dichotomy amongst various officials as to whether these abuses were the result of their refugee situation or the prevalence of such in most parts of Africa. Whilst both reasons might be the case, I would argue the former reason and the vulnerability it occasions, aggravates the abuse of women.

¹⁰² These views were supposedly expressed by some refugee women at a WISE workshop on the camp. Though this was expressed as personal views, I think it unfortunate given that this is the organisation entrusted with handling (S) GBV cases. There were other indications however that they handled this responsibility seriously.

¹⁰³ This is not to suggest that female staff cannot perpetrate this kind of thing but merely a response to the argument that the majority of staff are female and the implication that this reduces the likelihood of SGBV.

¹⁰⁴ This is a very informative report on cases of SGBV perpetrated by so-called "protectors" or officials against women and children in some camps in West Africa - *Forced Migration Review 15*, October 2002.

¹⁰⁵ Both the UNHCR and the Social Counsellor admitted that most members of this group, unlike the peer counsellors, had failed to carry out their responsibilities satisfactorily. Infact they indicated that it was hardly working but indicated that plans were on course to re-train the few dedicated ones so they can complement the

efforts of the peer counsellors in addressing (S)GBV and other such issues. There was also talk of trying to get the Women and Juvenile Unit (Waju) of the police to operate on the camp – Interview, UNHCR-Ghana; The Social Welfare officer assigned to the Camp.

¹⁰⁶ For ethical reasons and in cognisance of the possibility that these may be mere allegations, I choose to not mention names. It is also to protect those who courageously, albeit uncomfortably, shared such insights for the consequences it could entail when made public. This is especially the case as the refugees consider the services rendered in this particular case to be of vital importance to them.

¹⁰⁷ Implicit reference to what others complained about, that is, the immodest dressing code among the youth that could tempt undisciplined men. Even if this was the case, it is my view that such men have no excuse whatsoever for their actions.

¹⁰⁸ Ghanaian expression for prostitution

¹⁰⁹ This is the term the Liberians used for teenage pregnancy. The explanation was that the very young teenagers, who were themselves considered “children”, were birning (giving birth to) babies.

¹¹⁰ These were pictures a respondent had wanted to capture through the auto photography exercise. She was unable to manipulate the camera but related the accounts of some anticipated photo shots.

¹¹¹ Many parents have left their children and gone abroad but continue sending them remittances until they can come for them later.

¹¹² The use of alcohol, though a likely substance of abuse among both the adult and the youth, is here employed sparingly as specific information related to this issue was neither collected during this study nor did it explicitly come up during the various discussions. The existence of the problem was however implied during informal conversations but was generally considered to be characteristic of any given society.

¹¹³ The extent to which this education is effective can easily not be ascertained as many still dropout due to pregnancy.

¹¹⁴ Some youths actually engage in various trading activities to support themselves through school. Some were operating wheelbarrows to cart goods of passengers from the station to various locations in exchange for a fee. This, they indicated, was to help supplement their pocket money for school - Observation/Informal Discussion during research.

¹¹⁵ Personal testimonies of beneficiaries of the DAFI Scholarship scheme in Ghana – “*The Refugee, Our story, My Story*; UNHCR-Ghana, 2004”.

¹¹⁶ This expression, when used on the camp, denotes a sexual relationship with one or several partners.

¹¹⁷ Interview, Mr. Moses Bah, Chairman of Central Education Board, LRWC, 30/7/2004. Also see discussion on education in Chapter 5: Institutional Support.

¹¹⁸ The UNHCR handbook for emergencies states: “Given that education starts late in many developing and crises-affected countries, that schooling is interrupted by crisis and also that exact ages are not known where birth certificates are missing, there should be no precise upper limit for young persons benefiting from...schooling” (UNHCR 1999a:108, 2nd ed., Geneva)

¹¹⁹ The headmaster also advanced another reason for the rude behaviour. He asserted: “Some students are still traumatized. They may be performing alright in class but their behaviour with respect to discipline leaves much to be desired. They can also impact negatively on others” – Interview, Headmaster of SSS section, BUDUSEC

¹²⁰ See chapter 5, Section 5.5 for the statistics - under “Women and Children’s Affairs”

¹²¹ This law apparently stipulated that after delivery, a girl should be allowed to continue her schooling but in a different school. This was partly done to reduce the shame that might prevent them from continuing with their education. On the camp however, this rule may not apply as it is a relatively small community where everyone knows the other.

¹²² Apparently, Dr. K. Addo-Kuffour, the former Defence Minister, advocated for a relocation of the camp further away from Accra for security reasons. This, he claimed, would ensure a total control of some **4,000 suspected combatants** on the camp by the national security apparatus - *The Crusading Guide*, Tuesday, 29 April 2003, local newspaper.

¹²³ This involves the collection and correction of mistakes on ID cards earlier issued. The refugees are given forms to basically help UNHCR build its database. It’s however said to be more detailed with a lot more questioning done to know people’s background – Interview, UNHCR, 10/8/04

¹²⁴ Implicit in this is the suggestion that, UNHCR is itself not sure of the situation and can only guess. But then again, he could be speaking from experience as he was a part of the mission sent to survey Liberia before the 1997 VR exercise.

¹²⁵ Referring to the food distribution organised by the FAO. They stated categorically that it was only for targeted groups who arrived after 2002. They thus had no intention of extending it to the entire population nor was it meant to be a regular feature upon which one could depend.

¹²⁶ In an interview with the Private Transport Service providers on the camp, they confirmed that there were a lot of movements to and from Liberia. This was evidenced by the truckloads regularly traveling to and from Liberia through La Cote D'Ivoire, even though this could be hazardous given the war situation in the latter. The usual practice then is for the refugees to go and survey the situation in Liberia and return as and when possible. The providers indicated that some based in the camp, even sometimes of different nationalities, regularly traded between these two places. These in their view could rightly not be considered as refugees but as traders, even if they were Liberian. UNHCR agreed, citing this as one of the reasons why it would be "dangerous" to grant everybody blanket refugee status – Interview, GPRTU on the camp; UNHCR

¹²⁷ Most of the comments from this paragraph are based on informal conversations/discussions at different times. They are thus not direct quotes. They have however been paraphrased as they inform the discussion of the topic under consideration – culled from Research

¹²⁸ Many encountered problems of passage, were trapped on the high seas and had to be rescued. Some may possibly have lost their lives and/or whatever little belongings they managed to take along. For instance see (UPI 2004) on <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/artikel.php?ID=49599> 31.03.2004

¹²⁹ See relevant articles on Ghanaweb News Archives (2004) <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/search.php> 31.03.2004. In Search for: type in "Liberian Refugees"; In year: type in "2004"; and hit "search". Articles 23, 9, 5, 2, 1 all provide useful information on returnees who took advantage of the 2004 VR exercise. Some articles cited reasons given by the refugees as to why they are leaving as well as some official views expressed about the sustainability of the programme.

¹³⁰ Referring to her 29 year old daughter who left Liberia to join her in the 2002 war. Her education was apparently disrupted back there. She has just had to remain home in the camp because she is above the school-going age. Other attempts at getting her into a computer school on the camp also failed. After paying the fees, the school closed down due to its inability to settle its electricity bills - AA, Life History interview, 2/8/04

¹³¹ UN was mostly used synonymously with UNHCR

¹³² The comparison though is tentative as the present study did not include self-settled refugees.

¹³³ This respondent had, on several occasions, gotten close to going but had been affected by an adverse decision due to 9/11. When she had what could be, her last opportunities to try again, her son had managed to let them fail. This was the final straw and she was so frustrated that she said she was ready to exclude him if ever the opportunity presented itself. This son has apparently been playing truant and has left home to join friends in Accra. She suspects him to be on drugs. She insists that he is old enough to cater to himself so she will not allow him to spoil the lives and chances of her other children – A.A, Life History Interview, 2/8/04

¹³⁴ Some professionals are even known to write a good refugee story for the resettlement application on behalf of friends and family. They also look at what these prepare for the interview, point out consistencies and help them upgrade their stories – Dick 2002

¹³⁵ This idea was used by Graham and Khosravi (1997) in an article on "Repatriation and Diaspora Culture among Iranians in Sweden". It suggests that the original homeland could be merely "the place of nostalgia" as opposed to other homes which meet practical needs. Thus "returning" home can mean returning to a home other than the original homeland.

¹³⁶ Scriptural reference at Isaiah 2: 4 found on the walls of the UN headquarters.

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Appendices

1. Background Information on Life History Respondents

Name	A. A. (Skilled Person)	B. B. (Woman of FHH)	C. M. (Resettled in Norway)	M. M. (Camp Girl-child)	P. C. (Male Respondent)
Age	48	40	43	19	62
Ethnic Background	Grebo Tribe Maryland county, South East Liberia	Gbandi Tribe Lofa County Northern Liberia	Capeman, Monsterrado County, Monrovia Township	Not mentioned	Sapo tribe, Sinou county, (close to Krahn element)
Marital Status	Widowed?	Widowed	Widowed? (Husband lost)	Single	Widow? (Wife lost)
No. of Children	8 (1 in Nigeria, rest on camp)	5 (1 lost in Liberia)	3	N/A	3 (2 lost)
Siblings	13	2 mentioned	1 twin, several step siblings	9 (with parents)	Not mentioned
Religious?	Very active Catholic	Yes CHRIDA	Very active Pentecostal	Yes	Very active CHRIDA
Relatives Abroad	4 (US)	None	Yes	N/A	Son
Remittances from Abroad	Yes	No	Unreliable	From time to time ex-boyfriend	From time to time
Educational Background from Liberia	Teacher training	Informal business	High School	Daycare center	University Diploma Certificate in Social Science and History
Skills/Work Experience from Liberia	Principal, Administrator	Trader	Electricals, pay mistress for ministry of Finance	N/A	Teacher in Junior High, Claims and Insurance Manager in shipping, Insurance Firm
Skills acquired in Ghana	HIV/AIDS workshop, Administrative	None	Batik, tie and dye making	Education (SSS)	Leadership skills Health/ HIV AIDS workshop
Reasons for Flight	War of 1996, Rebel attacks on family	Violent killing of husband, high tension, persecution	Rebel attack on family high tension	Parent's decision	Rebel torture due to tribal affiliation and job position
Cost of War	Violent killing of children's father and, pregnant housemaid,	Husband, Children (step)	Husband, Child paralysed, Death of mother and 3 sisters (2002 war)	Uncertainty of future prospects.	Wife and 2 children lost, parents (whole village wiped out)

2. Background Information on Shadow Life History respondents

Name	C. P.	E. M.	J. J.	V. N.	R. N.
Age	49	16	33	49	20
Ethnic Background	Grand Cru, Sastown? County	Same as CM	Loma Tribe, Lofa County	Not mentioned	Not mentioned
Marital Status	Widowed	Single	Widowed	Widowed	Single
No. of Children	5(1 Lost)	N/A	1	5 (5 more by husband)	N/A
Siblings	Many	2 (with mother on camp)	5 (2 dead, 1 in Liberia)	Not mentioned	10
Religious?	Yes (Church of Christ)	Yes (Pentecostal)	Not mentioned	Active Catholic	Catholic
Relatives Abroad	N/A	N/A	Mother-in-law	N/A	N/A
Remittances from Abroad	N/A	N/A	Regular (for Child's education)	N/A	N/A
Educational Background from Liberia	N/A	None	Vocational, tailoring	Vocational training	Nursery
Skills/Work Experience from Liberia	Trading	N/A	Student	Childcare worker Chairlady of Women's wing of Doe's party	N/A
Skills acquired in Ghana	None	Education (JSS 1)	Sewing	Batik, Tie & Dye Foster parenting	Education (JSS)
Reasons for Flight	Tribal persecution husband killed, house burnt	Paralysed by rebels, mother's decision	Rebel attack (Heavy pregnancy)	Husband killed, government troop	Mother's decision
Cost of War	Husband, son, House	Health Father lost	Siblings, boyfriend (child's father)	Husband, Social status	Father beheaded, bleak future prospects

3. Key Informants

Mr. Bawumia - GRB

Liisa Quarshie – Snr. Protection Assistant , UNHCR-Ghana

Needa Jehu-Appiah- Public relations Officer, UNHCR-Ghana

Mr. John Thompson- Settlement Manager, Camp Management

Mr. William Atta-Mens – Administrative Assistant to Settlement Manager, Camp
Management

Mr. Arnold Obidieh – Utility Officer, Camp Management

Dorothy Kumah – Social (Counselor) Development Officer

Alice Apronti – Health Education/ Case Management, WISE

Sarah G. Adu – Counselor/ Coordinator, WISE

Francis Hinnah- Chairman of LRWC

Alice Abraham – Co-Chair Administration, LRWC

Mae Moisema – Coordinator of Women and Children’s Affairs, LRWC

Mrs. E. Washington- King – Deputy to Coordinator of Women & Children’s Affairs, LRWC

Mr. Moses Bah – Chairman for Central Education Board, LRWC

Besmon Best – Assistant Coordinator of NGOs, LRWC

Mr. Emmet F. Tumbay – Team Head of NWT

Mrs. Evangeline Martin – Head of Female Auxiliary, NWT

Mr. Edward Tailey – Headmaster, SSS section of BUDUSEC

NGOs/CBOs

Marilyn Clinton – Vice President, LIREWO

Jeremiah T. Burgess – Head of SHIFDS

Simeon Rubbers – Executive Director of CBW

Agnes – Director, Labour Women and Children’s Home

Mrs. Ethel Dicks- Registrar, Virtuous Woman School

Nayla Hamdi – SHIFDS Volunteer

Nora P. Sallor – Secretary, AHEAD

4. Interview Guides

A. Life Histories

Background Information

1. Name (to be identified or changed at respondent's discretion)
2. Age
3. Nationality
4. Marital status
5. Number of children (if any)
6. Place of origin (in Liberia)
7. Year of arrival in Ghana
8. Ever returned?
 - b) How many times?
 - c) For what reasons?

Displacement Experience

What occasioned flight?

From where did you flee?

With Whom? (family members, others)

Where are your parents/ immediate family presently?

Where did you flee initially?

If to Ghana, Why? (Did you have any prior contacts here i.e. relatives, friends or through evacuation)

To which camp did you go immediately?

If Gomoa-Budumburam, have you been here ever since?

Life in Country of origin

What was your level of education back home?

Did you have vocational skills?

Any Work experience?

How would you describe your life back home before the war?

What would you say about you and your family's social status back home? (low, middle, high Income) - "sensitive question"

Political/Conflict situation

What in your view caused the war? (immediate, remote)

How would you describe your country before the war?

How has the war situation been over the years?

How is it now?

What are your views on ECOMOG/ECOMIL activities in Liberia?

What about the International Community's response in the past and now?

What has the war cost you and your family?

Camp Life

For how long have you been in this camp?

Has your stay here been continuous or marked by journeys to and from home?
In case of journeys to and fro, how often?
Any ideas how this camp is organised?
Which organisations are in charge here?
Do you know about any Internal organisations formed by the refugees themselves and helping/working in various ways?
Which organisations are offering assistance here?
Do you know about the UNHCR-Ghana and what they are doing here?
What do you think about their activities here?
Do you know about the Neighbourhood Watch Team? The Liberian Refugee Women's Organisation?
What are their contributions? Strengths/ weaknesses as you see it?

How is a typical day in the camp like for you?
What do you do every day?
How was it like in the beginning when you arrived?

What are about the educational prospects?
Are there enough schools here for the children to attend?
Is it easy for one to gain access to school? What are the requirements? any challenges in this respect?
Are there any programmes in place for the refugees to train/ improve upon their skills?
Who is in charge of all these programmes (if any) and how does one qualify to participate?
Are you involved in any such programmes?
What sort of skill training is provided? (is it of use in the camp, will it be of use back home)
Does religion play an important role in your life? How so?

Reasons Informing Choice of One Durable Solution over Other

Return or VR: Do you know what the situation is really like back home now?
Have you ever returned home? Why?
Why did you come back here?
Would you want to go back home now? Why?
Do you ever think of going home to settle (if possible when would that be for you)?
What would make you want to remain in Liberia?
Given the choice between return and reintegration into Ghanaian society, which would you go for and why?
Do you know of any official (UNHCR, Ghana Government program) call for refugees to return home? Have any steps been taken in that direction by the authorities?
What do you feel about that?

Reintegration: How do you find life in Ghana?

If you had the choice, would you want to naturalise as a Ghanaian?
Or would you rather be recognised as any other foreigner living here in Ghana but not as a refugee in this camp?
Do you think you are ready for the implications and or responsibilities this might imply?
What do you think would make you ready to be integrated properly here in Ghana?
What would help you live comfortably/ make you feel at home here in Ghana?

Do you have any skills/training that would be useful here in Ghana?
Are you able to use them here now?
If no, what would enable you to do so?
Have you acquired or planning to acquire any additional skills that have proven/might be useful?

Resettlement: Do you know of any opportunities to go somewhere else other than Liberia or Ghana?

Do you know of any programs in place to resettle refugees to a third country (in the West)?

Do you know how one qualifies to take part in this program?

If given the opportunity, where would you prefer to go and why?

Personal security

Do you feel safe in the camp?

If no, what do you think makes it unsafe?

What are some things that cause insecurity?

Who are most at risk?

Do you think women and children are protected here?

Are there rape cases here (how often)?

Are there areas here that are known to be dangerous (What for)?

Is it easy to report problems to the authorities?

Do you know of any steps that are taken to solve problems when reported?

Do you know of any programs in place to protect victims so they are not harassed (after reporting)?

Do people ask for favours before providing assistance/aid (in what form)?

Are you aware of the UNHCR-Ghana staff changes in 2000 and what caused that?

Do you agree that the UNHCR-Ghana staff changes coupled with the presence of the Neighbourhood Watch Team has considerably improved security in this camp? How so?

Coping Strategies

How/what are you doing to survive from day to day?

Have you benefited in any way by being in this camp?

Do you have any long-term plans/ for the next 5 years?

What are they?

Do you think about the future, what do you see?

Where do you see yourself in the next few years?

What goals have you set for yourself (if any) and what steps are you taking towards reaching them?

What obstacles do you foresee in trying to reach these goals?

Do you have any ideas as to how to counter these obstacles?

What resources by way of assistance could help you reach these?

If you could make a request from the Ghana Government, what would you ask?

If you could ask for any assistance what would that be?

B. Key Informant Interviews

i) UNHCR-Ghana Official (s)

Do you oversee other countries in the sub-region?
What are your activities here in Ghana?
How many camps are here in Ghana?
Approximately how many in the camp?
Are all the refugees recognised officially as such (given refugee status)?
If no, what percentage are recognised as such?
What criteria is employed in determining this?
What programmes do you have in place in the Gomoa-Budumbura Refugee Camp?
Do you have any specific programmes in place for them with respect to education, job/skills training?
Are they able to practise any of these skills (if any) as a means of earning a decent living?
Do you have any collaborating agencies (who are they)?
Do you work hand in hand with the GRB, in what areas?

What were the reason(s) for your withdrawal of Assistance in 2000?
Did you withdraw all your assistance programmes to all groups during this time?
If no, who were you assisting and how did they qualify for assistance?
Since when did you resume assistance to the camp?
Who are you providing assistance to presently?
In what form(s)?
Which groups form the bulk of these (beneficiaries)?
Who do you consider the most vulnerable group among the refugees and why?
Are there any special programmes in place for these?
What is your assessment of the security situation at the camp with respect to women and children?
What are the main causes of insecurity?
Who are the most vulnerable in the camp?
How is security situation like for women and children in the camp?
What security programmes /measures in place to protect refugees?
Is Gender-based violence a significant problem here?
What about rapes?
What facilities (if any) do you have in place to deal with such problems?
What recourse do victims have (are they usually free to report incidents and protected by confidential handling of matters)?
Are and in what ways are perpetrators brought to book?
What would you say about the role of the Neighbourhood Watch Team in ensuring security at the camp?
What measures in your view could be adopted to improve the security situation there?

What current policy are you implementing with respect the proposed durable solutions?
How successful have they been?
What factors do you take into consideration with respect to “return” of the refugees?
What in your view would enable them to return and stay?

How is the current situation in Liberia like?
Which of these solutions do you think is realistic in view of the present circumstances/situation?
Are there any resettlement to a third country programmes in place?
If yes who qualify and to what destinations?
What in your view are the prospects for these refugees?

What occasioned the staff changes in the UNHCR-Ghana staff?
When exactly was this?
Was this in the interest of the camp residents (esp. women)?
Would you agree that these changes coupled with the presence of the Neighbourhood Committee has made the camp a safer place to be now for the refugees?

ii) Ghana Refugee Board Official (s)

Role
Activities in Gomoa-Budumbura camp
Reasons for dissolution of Board
Exactly when occurred and why
Exactly when re-constituted
Policies with respect to durable solutions
Any programs in place to ensure smooth transition in case of re-integration of some refugees
What is your preferred durable solution and why?

Resource provision in terms of education, skills and training?
What are the educational prospects in general for the refugees especially children?
Collaborating institutions/bodies and activities done in concert with them
How many are recognised officially and by what criteria
View on what necessitated staff changes in UNHCR-Ghana
Achievements chalked so far in real terms

Who are the most vulnerable in the camp
How is security situation like for women and children in the camp
What security programmes /measures in place to protect refugees

What problems do you encounter in dealing with refugees
For how much longer could the camp last in practical terms
Is the camp going to be dissolved? If yes, when?
What happens to the residual caseload?

iii) Camp Management Official (s)

Role

Activities in the Camp

When constituted

How camp is managed

Profile of refugees

How is life in the camp generally organised?

What Educational Programmes are in place for Refugees?

Who do you consider to be vulnerable?

Do you have a hand in identifying these for assistance and how do you do so?

What activities (if any) were in place to enable you cope during UNHCR's Withdrawal?

What are the main causes of Insecurity here?

What programmes do have in place to address these?

Is SGBV a problem here? What about Rape?

What mechanisms do you have in place to deal with perpetrators?

What recourse do victims have? What mechanisms are available to encourage them to report?

How have you dealt with such cases in the past and now?

Are you collaborating with any institutions?

Who is the brainchild behind the formation of the NWT?

How do you assess their role vis-à-vis security here?

What measures could be adopted to improve the overall security here?

What are your policy stance on the proposed solutions (if any)?

Do you consider return or re/integration as viable solutions to your protracted displacement?

Explain.

What in your view would enable a sustained return and/or reintegration?

NB: Supplementary questions were posed and other issues addressed as and when they arose in the course of all the interviews. The key informant questions were adapted and changed where necessary for other key interviews.