

Initial refugee assessment

LIBERIA
Ivorian refugee influx
and food security



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World Food Programme

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Acronyms

FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization

GAM: Global Acute Malnutrition

JAM: Joint Assessment Mission

OCHA: Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

LRRRC: Liberia Refugee, Repatriation and Resettlement Commission

UNHCR: United Nations High Commission for Refugees

UNMIL: United Nations Mission in Liberia

USAID: United States Agency for International Development

WFP: World Food Programme

Cover photo by Kudzayi Mazumba.

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Executive summary

Since the second round of the Ivorian presidential election in November 2010, a flow of refugees fleeing violence in Western Côte d'Ivoire has been arriving in Nimba County. As of January 6 2011, **UNHCR had registered some 22,828 refugees**, with new arrivals estimated at 400 to 600 per day. These refugees are presently located in some 23 isolated rural communities along the border, and are staying with host households.

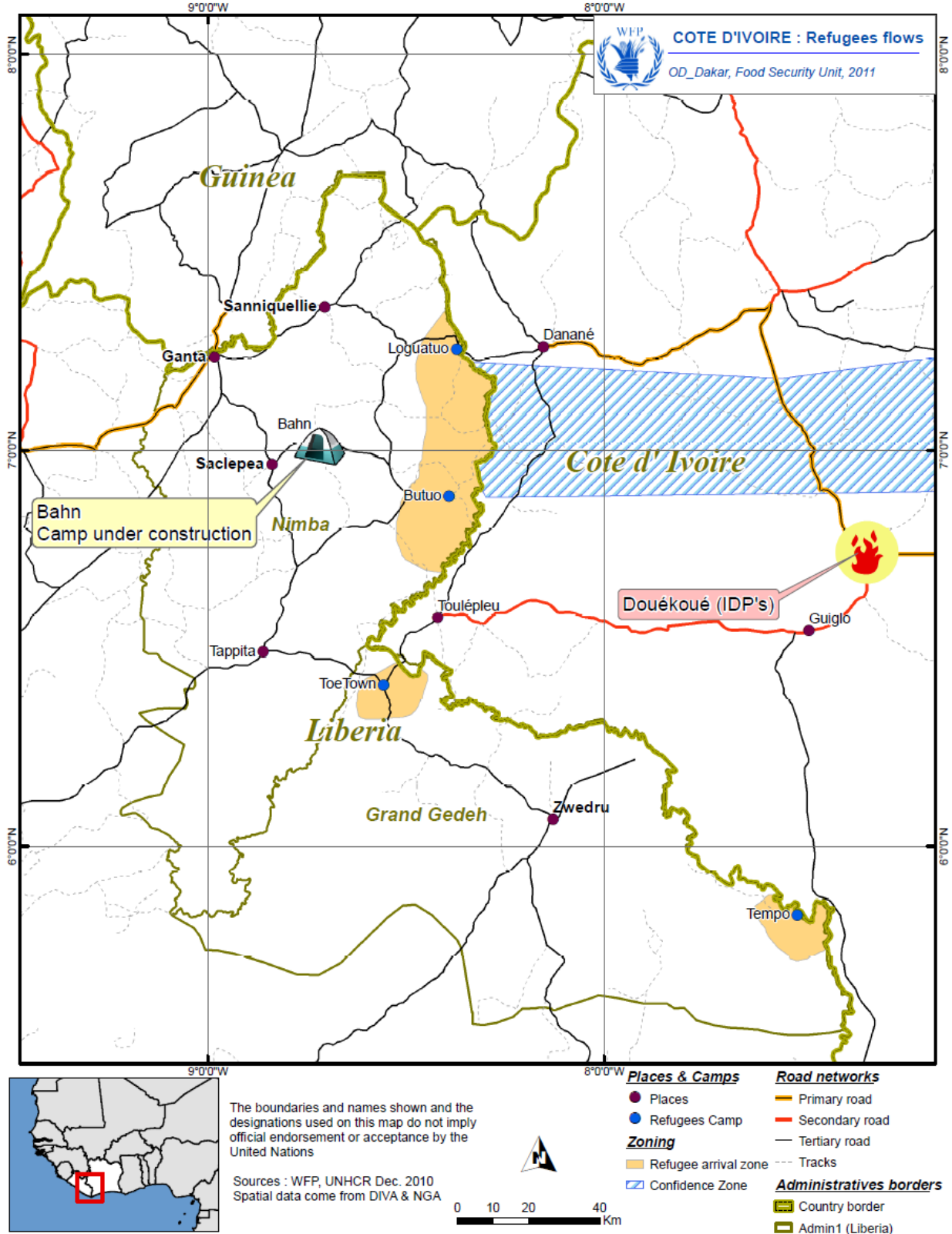
Some 95 percent of refugees have arrived in Nimba County, an area whose relatively developed cash crop economy offers some food access opportunity to arriving refugees. As of early January, refugees' main coping mechanisms have been support from host communities and participation in farm labor. Relief distributions that began in early January 2011 are also supporting coping. Nonetheless, **refugees' food consumption is inadequate, and food assistance is urgently required**. According to the most recent nutrition surveys carried out in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire, global acute malnutrition rates in refugee's area of origin (6-7%) are thought to be higher than in the host area. It is expected that **acute malnutrition rates among both host and refugee households will deteriorate** with the demands placed on limited local resources.

Markets have reacted to the refugee influx: in comparison with January 2010, 'country' rice prices have increased by 25-50% in host villages. Imported rice prices remain stable for now. Traders expect a moderate rise in food prices in the near future, due to higher demand. The 80% of rural households in Nimba that engage in cash cropping are experiencing improving terms of trade for rubber, palm oil and cocoa, strengthening their capacity to cope with the refugee influx. Nonetheless, **higher staple food prices and potential competition with refugees for labor opportunities might limit food access for the poorer host community households**. According to the 2010 'State of Food Security in Liberia' report, some 10 to 20% of host community households may be assessed as having 'poor' food consumption; provisions to assist this vulnerable group should be made.

Refugees should receive either i) full food rations or ii) partial rations complemented with supplementary feeding for vulnerable refugee groups. Food-for-work, a self targeting form of assistance, is suggested for the 20% of the host community most exposed to the negative consequences of the refugee influx. Supplementary feeding activities in the host area should be scaled up.

The operational context will change significantly in coming months (transition to a camp-based setting, onset of the rainy season and lean season in May), affecting needs and response capacities. The dynamic nature of the situation in Nimba County calls for regular assessments and subsequent adjustments to the response strategy. As food markets are thought to be functional in Nimba County, a mission to identify the scope of possible cash interventions at a later stage of the response should be organized in February. Finally, development partners should be involved in the coordination process, as their contribution will be required for early relief effort.

Overview map



1. Background, objectives and methodology

1.1 Background and objectives

Since November 28, post-electoral violence in Western Côte d'Ivoire has led to a sustained influx of refugees into eastern parts of Liberia. An initial joint rapid needs assessment took place 2 December 2010, at a time when the caseload of refugees was a few hundred. Since then, the inflow of refugees into Liberia has accelerated as incidents continued in Western Côte d'Ivoire.

The refugee caseload exceeded 5,000 on December 20, 2011. As of January 6, some 22,828 refugees had arrived in Nimba County, mostly families with an average size of 4. The caseload is 55% female. Some 60% of refugees are under 18. A much smaller caseload of 134 refugees had reached Grand Gedeh County. The increase in the refugee caseload, and its possible impacts on the host population, requires a modification in the scale and the strategy of the food response. A rapid assessment was organized in order to support the design of the next stage of the food sector response.

The rapid assessment was meant to provide interim guidance to food assistance programming, until such time as an in-depth assessment could be performed. Specifically, the study was meant to estimate food availability conditions and food access possibilities of refugee and host populations, and develop recommendations on appropriate response options.

1.2 Methodology and limitations

The mission, which took place from January 4 2011 to January 8 2011 visited Nimba county and Grand Gedeh county. USAID representatives participated in the mission. The mission visited the communities of Kporlay, Duplay, Zorgoweh, Old Loguato (Nimba County) and B'hai and Toes Town (Grand Gedeh County). The mission met with key informants that included county authorities, LRRRC, UNHCR, UNMIL and NGO representatives. Interviews took place with refugee and host population representatives. The mission interacted with market traders in Zorgoweh (located close to the border), and in the larger trading towns of Saclepea and Ganta (Nimba county).

Preliminary findings were shared January 8, 2011 at an ad hoc meeting attended by OCHA, LRRRC, UNMIL and WFP.

The dynamic nature of the current food situation in the area of concern implies that the findings presented are valid for a very limited period. The qualitative nature of the methods employed does not allow for a high degree of precision in reported indicators. As such, results are reported in ranges.

2. Impacts of the refugee influx on food security and markets in Nimba and Grand Gedeh Counties

This chapter outlines the impacts the refugee inflow has had on food markets. It also illustrates household level food access in Nimba and Grand Gedeh counties for refugees and hosts. Although local increases in country rice prices have taken place, imported rice prices remain stable. Refugees – who arrived in Côte d’Ivoire with few belongings-, are now experiencing acute food deficits that are to some extent mitigated by resources from their hosts and their participation in casual farm work. Host communities are better off for now, due to their access to the ongoing rice harvest and cash cropping opportunities.

2.1 The host environment

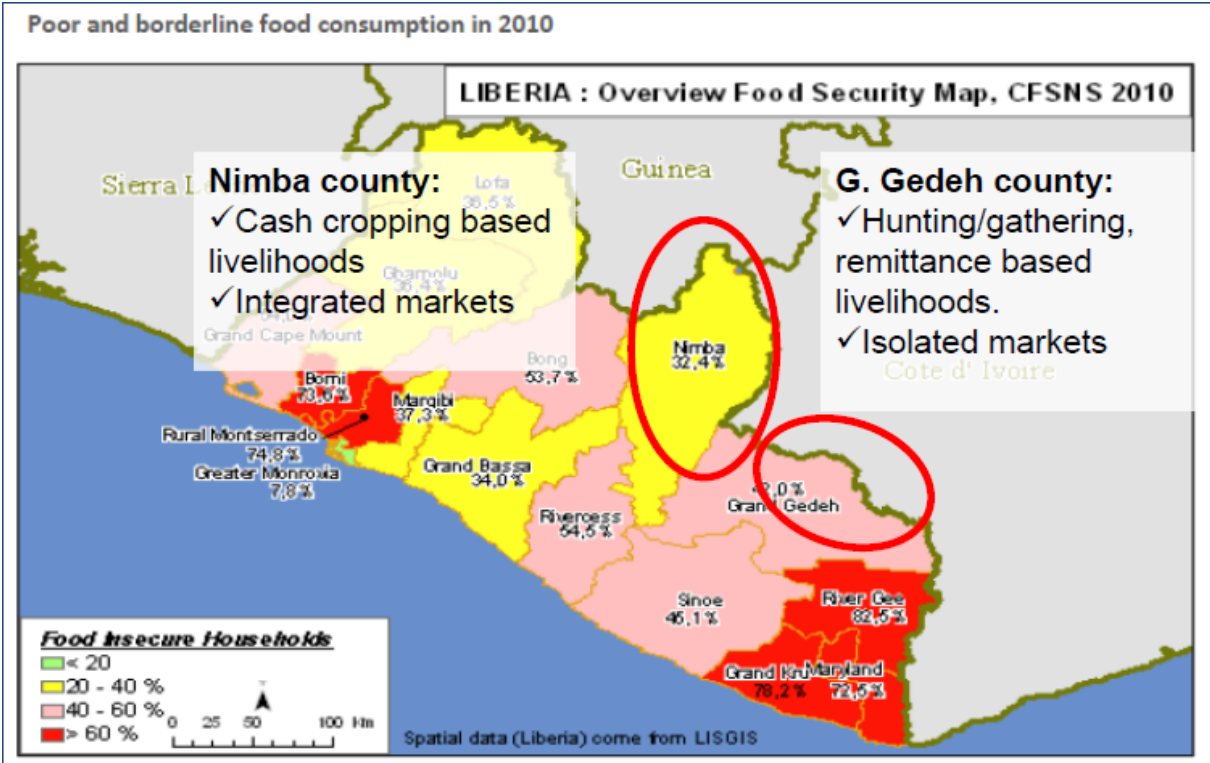
The host area has a history of population displacement. In the 1990s, many Liberians fled to Western Côte d’Ivoire during Liberia’s civil war. According to UNCHR, as of late 2003, some 38,000 refugees had arrived in Liberia following the outbreak of internal conflict in Côte d’Ivoire. At the time, many of these refugees arrived in Nimba and Grand Gedeh counties. Furthermore, the fact that the many of the displaced and their Liberian hosts share the same ethnic and linguistic background is thought to be conducive to solidarity between hosts and the refugees currently arriving from western Côte d’Ivoire.

When they first arrive in Liberia, refugees are ‘placed’ in host families – usually ethnic kin- through an informal process that involves traditional local authorities. In Grand Gedeh, some incoming refugees are placed with Ivorian refugees who settled in Grand Gedeh in 2003. Formal registration of the refugees subsequently takes place with LRRRC and UNHCR. Initially, refugees were welcomed in host communities. As of January 2010, there are reports that the attitude of the host community might be changing, as increasing numbers of refugees strain local resources.

Refugees are arriving in host environments whose characteristics affect their short-term food access opportunities (Map 1). Nimba County, home to over 400,000 people before the refugee influx, is Liberia’s leading cash crop producing area. The 2010 ‘State of Food Security in Liberia’ report indicates that 80% of households in Nimba engage in cash cropping. Indeed, 34% of Nimban households produce palm oil; 10% cocoa and 8% coffee - the highest rates of any Liberian county. This dynamic cash crop sector supports a casual labor market. According to the ‘State of Food Security in Liberia’, the prevalence of food insecurity in Nimba County is below the Liberian national average, with 9.2% of the population assessed as having ‘poor’ food consumption.

The host environment for refugees arriving in Grand Gedeh County (population 137,000) is less favorable. Although food insecurity levels in Grand Gedeh County are also below the national average (10.8% of the population with ‘poor’ food consumption), Grand Gedehans livelihoods are primarily on subsistence-based (hunting, small-scale farming) and remittance-based, providing but little scope for the economic integration of a refugee population.

Map 1: Poor and borderline food consumption



In seasonal terms, refugees have arrived at a time when populations are generally food secure (Figure 1), a factor that, to some extent, may have dampened the initial food impacts of the refugee influx. Refugees arrived during the main annual rice harvest – precisely at the time of year when host communities have the most resources to share. The host communities in Nimba County also sell cash crops (primarily rubber, palm oil and cocoa) during the dry season, supporting food household food access in the dry season. In the areas of Nimba receiving refugees, the swamp rice harvest was taking place and will continue through January. Local food availability will decline in the 2nd quarter of the year, and the peak of the lean season occurs from July to September.

Figure 1: Generic seasonal calendar

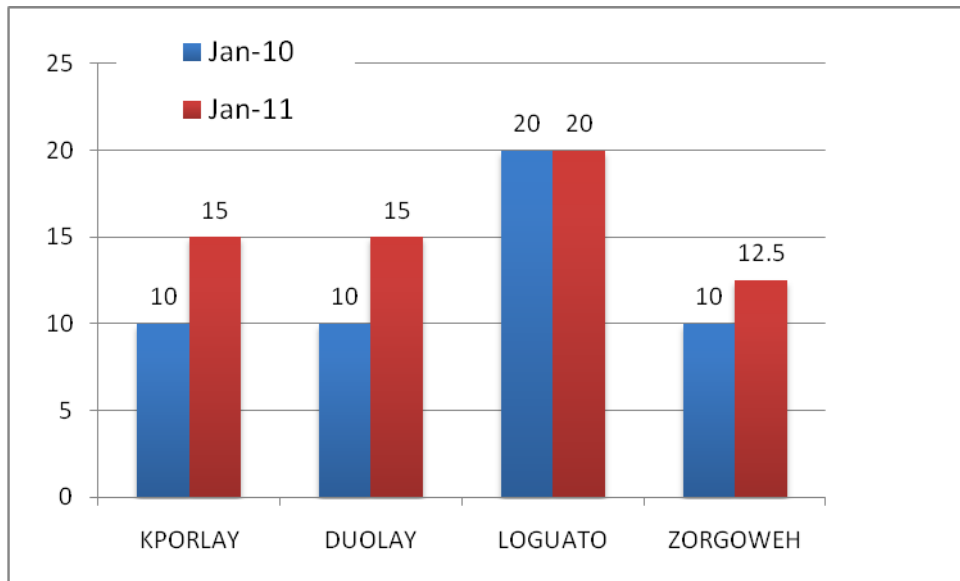
LIBERIA SEASONAL CALENDAR - 2010														
	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec		
Season	Peak of dry Season			Dry season ends	Rains begin		Peak of rainy Season			Rains end	Dry season begins			
Rice Farming				Planting (South Eastern)		Planting (rest of Liberia)		Harvesting (South Eastern)			Harvesting (rest of Liberia)			
Hunger period	Generally food secure			Increased food insecurity (Food stocks decline)		Hunger period begins		Peak of the hunger period			Hunger period ends		Generally food secure	

Source: Liberia comprehensive food and nutrition survey, 2010.

2.2 Impact on food availability and access

The refugee influx has led to a local increase of prices for local staples, due to higher demand. In villages receiving refugees, retail rice prices have increased from 25 to 50 percent compared to January 2010: the cup of rice that commonly sold for LD 10 a year ago is now sold for LD 15. The fact that some retailers have switched to smaller cups implies that the degree of the price increase might be understated. The price of other basic food commodities has increased as well. Retail palm oil prices are up by 20% approximately (however, in the case of palm oil, factors other than the refugee influx – such as higher domestic and regional demand – could also explain the price increase). Cassava piles offered for sale on the market are smaller than in the period immediately preceding the arrival of the refugees.

Figure 2: Retail price of local 'country' rice in Nimba County. Liberian Dollars per 'cup' (appx 200g/cup).



Source : community interviews

This surge in demand has yet to lead to an increase in prices for imported rice, however. The stability in rice prices is thought to be temporary: traders interviewed in the main market towns in Nimba County expect imported rice prices to increase moderately, as they did in 2002-2003, during a previous influx of refugees from Côte d'Ivoire. Traders identify two main factors that would lead to a moderate price increase for imported rice. Firstly, traders have limited access to credit. Traders from Nimba County pay cash on delivery at Monrovia Freeport. A very small proportion of imported rice is purchased on credit from importers, limiting traders' ability to increase rice volumes at short notice. Liberian rice dealers sell rice in LD to consumers, but buy rice in US Dollars. The need to exchange LD into USD is an added constraint for many traders (who therefore double as money-changers). The second factor is the behavior of the wholesalers in Monrovia – the rice import business is known to be concentrated, allowing wholesalers to increase prices when they detect an increase in demand. As was observed in the past, an inflow of imported rice from nearby Guinea could materialize were the price differential sufficient (WFP, 2010a). Should a refugee influx materialize in Grand Gedeh County, markets would be less responsive than in Nimba, especially in the lean season when road conditions deteriorate. A larger refugee influx into Grand Gedeh County would take place in the event of a population outflow from the Guiglo areas and remains a possibility in view of the volatile context of western Côte d'Ivoire.

As of January 2011, local cross-border exchanges were continuing normally between Liberian and Ivorian border markets. Villages on the Liberian side of the border tend to import commodities such as plantain, cassava and rice from Côte d'Ivoire. As arriving refugees reported significant disruptions to trade and price rises in western Côte d'Ivoire, it may be a matter of time before the trend begins affecting prices in areas of Liberia that rely on trade with Ivorian markets.

2.3 Refugees' food needs

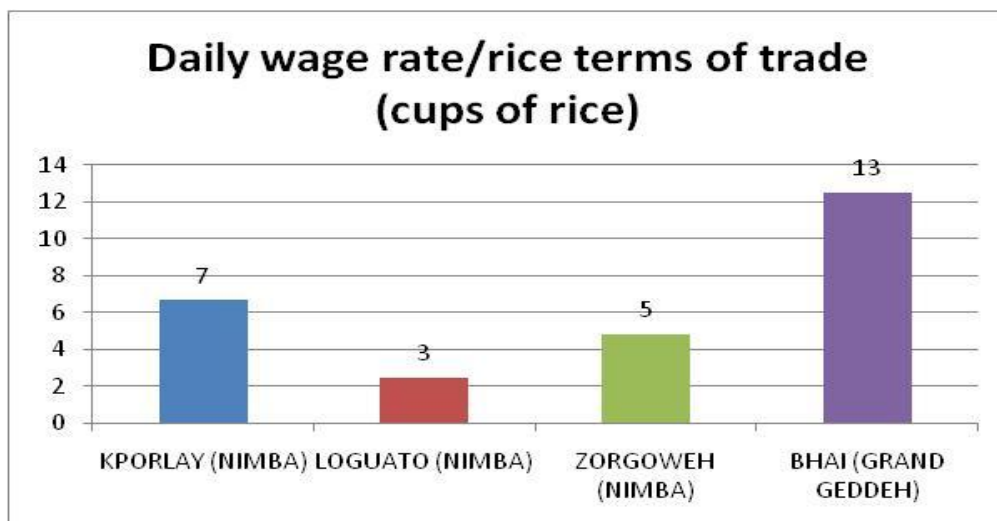
At present, refugee households having recently arrived in Nimba County are typically consuming a diet that falls short of requirements. Refugees will remain reliant on external assistance, as the coping mechanisms that have been developed (support from host households, participation in the local economy) remain insufficient to meet their food and non-food needs.

According to demographic data from UNHCR, registered refugees are 55% female, and 20% are under age 5. Some 60% of the refugees are under 18 years of age. Refugees in Nimba are predominantly from farming households that cultivate food (rice, cassava, taro) and cash crops (coffee, cocoa). Most refugees left their villages on foot to reach Liberia, carrying a very limited number of personal items with them. In many cases, refugees' crops were left standing. The mission was told that very occasionally, refugees from villages in the immediate vicinity of the border have crossed back to Côte d'Ivoire in order to harvest some of their crops before returning to Liberia. Refugees are currently living in host communities located along the border, and are staying with host families. The mission assesses that each host household has received from 3 to 5 refugees. In some cases, refugees are moving deeper into Liberia, reaching Saclepea (some 70 km from the border), a trend that would develop in the future.

As of January 2011, the main sources of support for refugees were i) host family support, ii) income earning activities and iii) relief distributions. Refugees are receiving food support from host families, most frequently a cooked meal in the evening. It is noted that some refugees are placed in host families with very few resources and cannot provide any food to their hosts. Refugees report engaging in the local labor market, where they earn daily wages that can vary from LD 50 to LD 150 or an in-kind payment in paddy rice. (Wage rate levels in Liberia are known to vary according to the specific occupation and local labor market conditions, as outlined in successive issues of the Liberia Price Monitor). Casual farm laborers commonly receive a cooked meal in addition to the daily wage. In addition to participation in casual labor, refugees reported sales of firewood as an income earning activity. Relief distributions of food and non-food items (through UNHCR and WFP) began reaching refugees during the first week of January and were to be scaled up that month.

Refugees from Côte d'Ivoire participate in income-earning activities that support household food access. For example, a refugee working for a day in Nimba County can be expected to earn a wage that would allow the purchase of 3 to 7 cups of local rice. That amount is equivalent to some 600-1,400 grams of rice – assuming a family size of 4, that translates to an equivalent of 150-350g per person. The energy equivalent of that amount of rice stands between 540 and 1260 kcal per person per day. The extent to which refugees' income-earning activities contribute to their overall household food access capacity should be assessed during an in-depth assessment.

Figure 3: Equivalent in cups of rice of the daily wage, early January 2011.



Source: interviews with host communities.

It is emphasized that these activities represent a modest amount of resources in the overall household economy and are insufficient on their own to meet the food needs of refugee households. Indeed, at present, reported food consumption patterns in refugee households are poor. The most common cooked meals are composed of a starch (either rice or cassava) and a sauce made of greens or of groundnuts. Refugees report that they eat once a day. Non-food needs are also high: access to clean water is problematic, especially in the more crowded localities (such as Loguato), where some refugees drink water drawn from unprotected sources. Health clinics are often hours away; some new arrivals are suffering from injuries (cuts, bruises) sustained during their walk through the bush from Côte d'Ivoire to Liberia and require first aid. Other refugees suffering from chronic illnesses no longer have access to prescription medicine. The degree to which these injuries or illnesses could affect refugees' capacity to work and therefore their food access potential was not assessed.

In this difficult context of the first weeks of displacement, refugees or hosts did not mention negative coping strategies, such as asset depletion or the consumption of wild foods. Reports of more damaging coping patterns were received from the Buutuo area, which the mission did not visit.

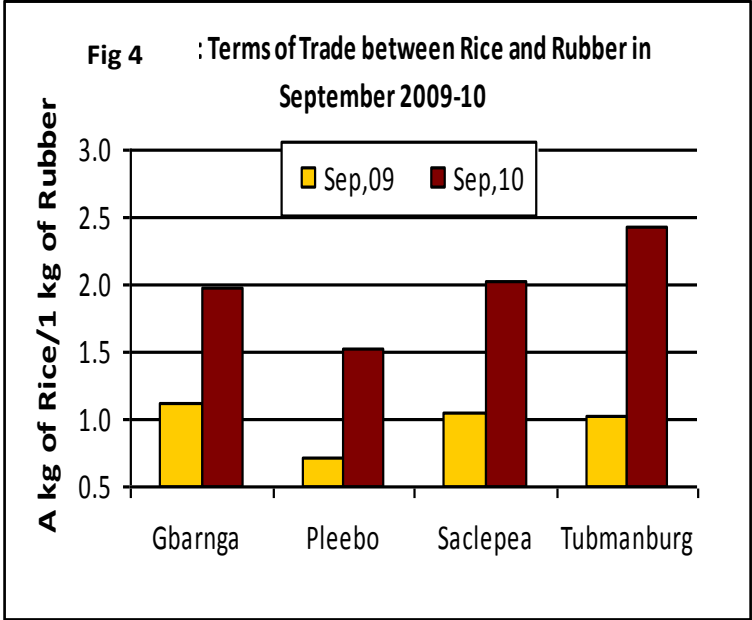
2.4 Host communities and households

Host communities are farming settlements located on the border with Côte d'Ivoire, linked to larger town in Nimba County by a network of poor rural tracks.. According to UNHCR, refugees were localted in some 23 host communities as of early January, mostly in Nimba County. It is likely that the number of host communities will increase as refugee registration proceeds. In some cases, the host community is outnumbered by the refugees. In Loguato, for instance, an initial population of some 1,743 persons is hosting 5,307 refugees. In such communities, the strain that refugees are putting on local resources is evident and may lead to a short-term reduction in welfare for the host population (overcrowding, competition for food, water, health services, labor opportunities). The medium term impacts of deserve to be assessed more specifically.

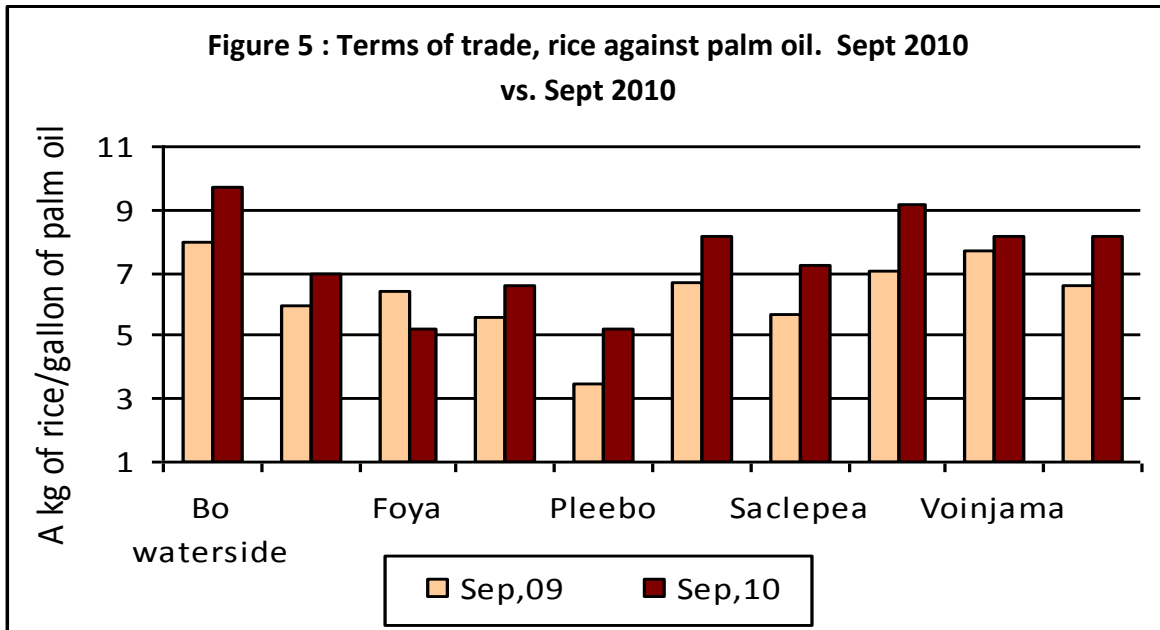
The host area in Liberia is known to have an underlying vulnerability to food security, 10 to 20 percent of the host population may be food insecure. The October 2010 'State of Food Security in Liberia' report indicates that one of ten households in Nimba is food insecure. However, the report also indicates that rural farming households—such as those hosting the refugees - are more vulnerable to food insecurity than those involved in non-farm occupations. Some 20% of farming households are assessed to be food insecure. This could be taken as an indication of the extent of baseline food insecurity in host households, until a new assessment could take place.

Prior to the refugee influx, cash crop producing host communities had been benefiting from an improvement in livelihood performance thanks to improved terms of trade for rice. This trend is of importance, as 80% of households in Nimba county produce cash crops. The September 2010 issue of the Liberia Monitor shows that rubber producers and palm oil producers are benefiting from an improvement in terms of trade.

Some 35% of households in Nimba produce rubber, a commodity that accounts for the majority of Liberia's export earnings. As of September 2010, rubber producers in Saclepea (Nimba) could purchase 2kg of imported rice, twice the amount they could purchase a year earlier. This is illustrated in Figure 4 to the right. The improvement in world rubber prices – linked to the recovery from the global recession - continues and is translating to higher prices at the farm gate. At the time of the mission, rubber was being bought for USD 1800 a ton at buying points in Nimba county.



Some 34% of households in Nimba produce palm oil. The value of palm oil in terms of rice is above last year's levels in nearly all of markets monitored in Liberia, including Saclepea. In September 2009 a liter of palm oil was worth the equivalent of 6 kilos of rice; the ratio has now increased to above 7:1 (Fig 5). The increase in terms of trade is driven by higher prices for palm oil compared to a year earlier. Here again, recovery from the global crisis is leading to higher palm oil prices on the international market, and on West African markets. This improvement of palm oil prices predated the arrival of refugees in Nimba County.



Source : Liberia Price Monitor

Some 8% of farming households in Nimba produce cocoa. In communities hosting refugees, it was reported that the farm gate price for cocoa had improved, increasing from LD 50-75 in January 2010 to LD 100 in 2011. It is also reported that cocoa from Côte d'Ivoire (the leading global producer of the commodity) is being sold in Liberia owing to the difficulty of shipping goods through Côte d'Ivoire.

As 80% of households in Nimba engage in cash cropping (76% food and cash crop, 4% cash cropping alone), it is reasonable to assume that these positive trends in the cash crop market are supporting household incomes and are therefore helping host communities cope with the initial consequences of the refugee influx. The extent to which the trend is supporting household-level food security outcomes for the host households should be determined in an in-depth assessment.

2.5 Nutrition

According to the available baseline information, children in Nimba County suffer from high rates of chronic malnutrition. Wasting rates, however, were thought to be below emergency thresholds prior to the refugee influx.

The State of the Food Insecurity in Liberia states that 'the chronic malnutrition situation in Liberia is critical', with overall rates above the 40% WHO threshold. In Liberia, children between the ages of 18 and 29 months are the most likely to be stunted. Stunting in Nimba County affects 43% percent of children. According to the State of Food Insecurity in Liberia, global acute malnutrition is assessed to at 2.8% (2.6% moderate, 0.2% severe) among children aged 6 to 59 months. Children aged 6-17 months show the highest GAM rates, estimated at 7.1%. The prevalence of global acute malnutrition was assessed at 1.2% among children of Nimba County.

The refugee population originates from an area of Côte d'Ivoire that is thought to have higher GAM prevalence than Liberia. According to the preliminary results of the 2010

SMART survey, carried out in July 2010, GAM rates stood at 6.1% in Montagnes and 7.0% in Moyen Cavally, both western Ivorian regions close to Liberia. Refugees' precarious living conditions (low protein diet, lack of access to clean water, poor access to health facilities) are such that an increase in GAM rates is expected within the refugee population.

Impacts : Key points.

- Nimba County, an area with a developed cash crop economy, is a more favorable host environment for refugees than Grand Gedeh County. To date, some 95% of refugees have arrived in Nimba County.
- Although country rice prices have increased locally by 25-50%, imported rice prices remain stable. A moderate rise in food prices is expected due to higher demand.
- Refugees' main coping mechanism has been support from host communities and participation in farm labor. Assistance to refugees started in early January.
- Some 10 to 20% of host households are assessed to have 'poor' food consumption (2010 'State of Food Security in Liberia'). The poorest host community households will be affected by higher food prices and perhaps by competition with refugees for casual labor opportunities.
- GAM rates in refugee's area of origin are thought to be higher than in the host area. An increase in GAM rates is likely.

3. Implications for response and monitoring

This section focuses on food assistance needs for refugees and the host population, on the basis of the impacts described in section 2. These assistance modalities are subject to review in light of the findings of an in-depth assessment.

As of early January 2011, initial distributions of assistance were taking place. Distributions of WFP-supplied high energy biscuits to the most vulnerable refugees began January 1st, with food rations in mid-January. UNHCR was distributing non-food item kits that included cooking utensils, lanterns, tarps, blankets and other items to refugees. Needs assessments were underway in other sectors (specifically health) which are expected to translate to a scale up of activities in that area. NGO plans to provide cash transfers to refugees were under discussion. No assistance had been targeted to host communities.

3.1 Assistance modalities

The analysis presented indicates that refugees arriving in Liberia require food assistance and are likely to continue relying on assistance for the next months. The specific context of Nimba County, namely the fact that many refugees have developed incipient coping mechanisms, suggests that food assistance could be provided under either of the two options outlined in Table 1. Essentially, WFP and partners would have to determine whether food assistance should consist in a full ration or a partial ration.

Table 1: Recommended response options for the refugee population.

Response options	Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>Option 1: General food distribution of full food rations for refugees.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Allows for sharing with host households. ✓ Simple to manage in the field. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × Risk that not all of the ration would be consumed. × Might undermine self reliance. × A reduction in the ration in the future would require preparation. × Could constitute a 'pull' factor. × Might depress local markets
<p>Option 2: General food distribution of an 85% ration for the refugees, and expansion of the supplementary feeding program.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Promotes existing self-reliance mechanisms. ✓ Reduces risk of distortion on local markets ✓ Less risk of a 'pull' factor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × Sharing with hosts might reduce the quantity effectively consumed by the targeted refugees. × Implies a scale up of nutrition activities.

Option 1 would provide for a full ration (2100 kcal), which makes some allowance for the sharing that is bound to take place with the host community. Option 1 would be straightforward to implement in the field. However, deciding in favor of option 1 would be done at the risk that the ration would not entirely be consumed, that self reliance might be undermined. An alternative option would provide for an 85% ration and supplementary feeding for vulnerable groups. The rationale for option 2, which provides for a somewhat lower ration, is that as refugees have developed incipient coping mechanisms that allow for some level of food access, a full ration is not necessary at this stage. The drawbacks of option 2 are that excessive sharing might leave refugees with food deficits, and that the introduction of nutrition activities that might be technically complicated to implement in a quick response setting. The approach that will be adopted would have to be one agreed to with the Government, HCR and endorsed by the Liberia food cluster.

It is recommended that allowance be made to deliver assistance to the fraction of the local population that is food insecure, some 20% of the refugee caseload. The support would be provided in March and April, when road access to host communities remains

possible. It is acknowledged that historically, food for work programs in Liberia have had difficulty absorbing resources. The mission considers that the arrival of new partners to respond to the food consequences of the refugee crisis might to some extent support such potential food-for-work activities. Furthermore, the envisaged caseload for food for work would be fairly small and is thought to be manageable under current scenarios. The ration would be the same as that used in the current food-for-work program in Liberia.

Table 2: Recommended response options for host population

Response option	Advantages	Disadvantages
Food for work, two months (March-April), for 20% of the refugee caseload.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Self-targeted ✓ More partners able to implement food for work are likely to become involved in the response 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × Some vulnerable host community members may not be able to work × Requires preparation

It is emphasized that the situation remains fast-changing, a review of assistance modalities will be required until the caseload stabilizes.

3.2 Scenario in the next 6 months

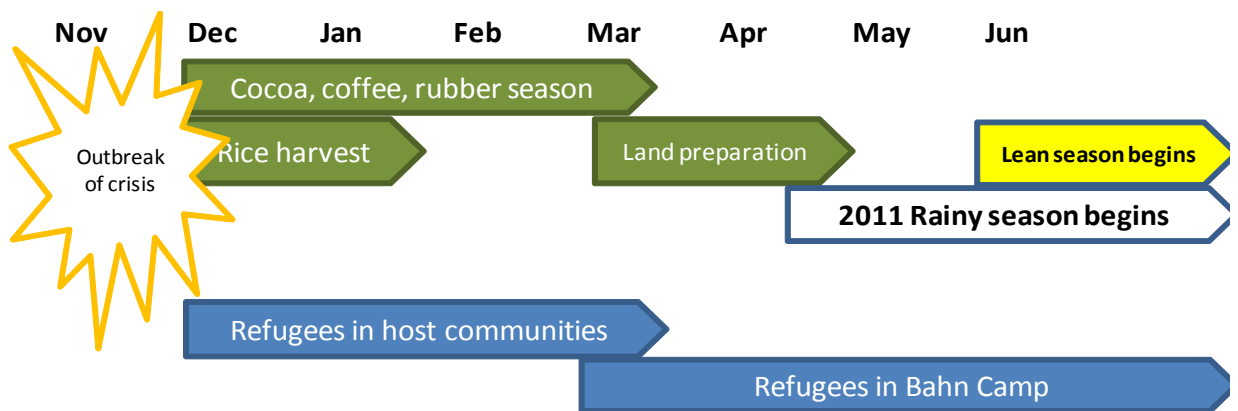
The following scenario is developed on the basis of a protracted crisis in Côte d’Ivoire. The resolution of the crisis would lead to another scenario where some refugees would consider returning to their home country. It is noted that the existing inter-agency contingency plan (which focuses on the immediate humanitarian consequences of the post-electoral crisis) provides for a caseload of 50,000 refugees in Liberia, without specific mention of the duration of needs.

Refugees have arrived in Nimba County during a period of peak local food availability and at a time when the main harvest for cash crops (cocoa, coffee, rubber) are taking place. As cash crop season winds down in March, agricultural activity will turn to land preparation. As of April, the rainy season will begin, and rural households will begin work on the next rice harvest (planting, weeding). At that stage road access to the host communities will be much more difficult, complicating assistance delivery. The lean season, when household food deficits are highest, would begin in June. The onset of the rainy season and lean season is expected to cause a seasonal peak in malnutrition.

UNHCR is preparing to set up a camp in the locality of Bahn (located 15km from Sacelpea, and 60km from the Loguato border point), which could initially accommodate some 18,000 refugees. It is expected that the camp would be operational sometime in March. The camp would be accessible year round, easing the delivery of assistance. The shift from a community-based to a camp-based setting will imply changes in refugees’ food access potential. The extent to which refugees continue engaging in the local labor market from a camp environment will have to be assessed. There is uncertainty about refugees’ willingness to move to a camp (although provision of French-language education would be an inciting factor), about the ability of refugees to engage in income

generating activities from a camp based setting, and refugees' ability to interact with markets from the site in Bahn.

Figure 5: Nimba County timeline, Nov 2010-Jun 2011.



It is expected that the current caseload will increase, as registration progresses and as new arrivals continue entering Liberia. As of early January, UNHCR reported that some 400 to 600 new Ivorian refugees were entering Liberia on a daily basis. It is too early to know how long they would stay in Liberia. At present, 95 percent of the refugee caseload is located in Nimba County. Should a significant inflow of refugees materialize in Grand Gedeh County, the opening of a camp in that area would likely be necessary as well. Refugees arriving in Grand Gedeh are expected to have less capacity to engage in the local economy than those in Nimba.

The arrival of refugees in significant numbers is expected to lead to a moderate increase in the wholesale price of imported rice in local markets in Nimba, which traders expect to reach 15 to 20 percent. Traders expect the price increase to be protracted, affecting the food access possibilities of the part of the host population that is food insecure and perhaps to refugees without assistance.

3.3 Further assessment needs

An in-depth assessment is recommended in the month of February. That study will assess the specific food security status and coping mechanisms of the refugee population, and that of the host community. It is hoped that the in-depth assessment will enable reporting on core food security indicators and lead to a revision of food assistance modalities at that stage. Specific questions would be:

- What are the livelihood and food access opportunities available to refugee households? How are these likely to change in a transition to a camp-based situation?
- What non-food assistance are refugees and host families receiving? How are these forms of assistance supporting the household economy?
- What response options exist to support self reliance?
- How widespread are negative coping strategies (selling assets, consumption of wild foods)?
- What is the contribution of host households to refugees' food access and livelihoods?
- How much of a burden on host household food reserves do refugees represent? What changes are likely when refugees move out of the host communities? What are host household's food production capacity in view of the 2011 rainy season?

A Joint Assessment Mission would be recommended once a significant number of refugees have settled into a camp. That assessment would focus on the food and nutrition situation of camp based refugee households, in keeping with existing guidelines on the topic.

3.4 Cash interventions in the response

The Liberia Market Review, carried out in 2007, indicates that markets in Liberia's central belt – including Nimba County - are integrated and can therefore be assumed to be generally favorable to cash interventions. However, cash interventions do imply a level of inflationary risk (due to the structure of Liberian markets, as importers wield a high degree of price setting power). Rural markets are known not to perform as well as urban ones. Should a cash intervention take place on a large scale, a price increase is consequently expected (WFP, 2010b). Liberia's limited road network also performs poorly during the rainy season. As such, cash responses are less likely to be relevant response options during the rainy season (May-October). It is noted that markets outside the 'central belt' of Liberia would be less likely to respond to additional demand.

In addition to the way markets work, there are also operational considerations – including security, possible 'pull' factors, and coordination considerations - that argue against large scale cash distributions at this early stage of the response. As of early January, NGOs were envisaging the viability of cash response plans. It is recommended that a decision on modalities of cash programming take place within the food security cluster in order to avoid potentially damaging overlaps with ongoing in-kind relief distributions.

Once the caseload has stabilized, cash responses will become more viable than they seem to be at present. Should refugees be moved to a camp that is accessible year round to traders, pure cash transfers, or food and cash transfers, may constitute opportunities to deliver resources to beneficiaries (refugees and hosts). It is recommended that a joint assessment of the feasibility of cash responses under the current context take place during the month of February.

Responses and monitoring : Key points.

- Refugees should receive either full rations (option1) or partial rations and supplementary feeding for vulnerable refugee groups (option 2). Food for work, a self targeting form of assistance, is suggested for 20% of the host community.
- The operational context will change in coming months (move to a camp, rainy season and lean season in May).The volatility of the situation calls for regular assessments and subsequent adjustments to the response strategy.
- Food markets are known to be functional in Nimba County. A mission to identify the scope of possible cash interventions at a later stage of the response should be organized in February.

4. Recommendations and conclusions

4.1 Recommendations

The analysis presented above argues for the following recommendations. Immediate food assistance for the refugee caseload should take place. Self-targeted assistance to the host population should be offered prior to the lean season in order to compensate for food deficit. In order to make such assistance viable, partners in the early recovery sector should be involved in existing coordination forums.

A joint in-depth assessment involving LRRRC, UNHCR and WFP is recommended in February to adjust the food response strategy. A JAM will be required when refugees will be in camps, tentatively in the second quarter of 2011. An assessment of the possibilities to undertake cash transfers in the response should also take place. On the specific issue of cash, it is recommended that decisions on cash transfers be taken within the food security cluster to favor a coordinated approach.

Recommendation	Time period
Provide immediate assistance to refugees Either a full ration including CSB (2100 kcal) or a partial ration with provision made for supplementary feeding for vulnerable refugees.	Immediately
Involve early recovery and development actors in the food coordination mechanisms.	Immediately
Conduct an in-depth assessment of household food security in areas affected by the refugee influx.	February
Conduct an operational cash assessment.	February
Conduct a JAM.	After refugees have settled in a camp
Provide assistance to the host community, through food for work and supplementary feeding activities.	March-April
Monitor the development of displacement in western Côte d'Ivoire. Ensure regular market monitoring activities.	Continuous

These recommendations temporary, until results from the in-depth assessment are available.

5. References

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