

The 4Rs: the way ahead?

by Betsy Lippman and Sajjad Malik

The 4Rs (repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction) is an integrated, inter-agency 'relief to development' approach for sustainable reintegration as part of transition.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s UNHCR found itself increasingly challenged to ensure the sustainability of returns with regard to the extent and time-frame of its engagement in repatriation and resettlement. This led to the recognition that more effective sustainable reintegration and incorporation of the needs of returning refugees and other displaced people into longer-term national development plans would be addressed only if development-oriented actors were engaged much earlier in the process.

In 1999 UNHCR initiated the Brookings Process, a partnership with UNDP and the World Bank, to undertake, with donor support, a pilot integrated approach in Sierra Leone. While this early effort stalled, in part because it was perceived as too headquarters-driven and because of renewed civil war in Sierra Leone, its spirit of integrated planning remained very much alive.

The arrival of Ruud Lubbers as UNHCR High Commissioner re-initiated the focus on voluntary repatriation and reintegration as the preferred durable solution for displaced populations. Because of the clear repatriation, rehabilitation and reconstruction mandates of the three agencies, a new partnership was revived in March 2002. This resulted in the 4Rs and agreement was reached to select Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Eritrea as pilots. However, there was never an intention to make this an exclusive agreement and other agencies (UNICEF, WFP, WHO, the International Labour Organisation (ILO), UNFPA, UN-HABITAT, OCHA and its Internal Displacement Division) soon joined the effort in recognition of the breadth and scope of activities needed to comprehensively address sustainable reintegration. The 4Rs is an approach to address the immediate, medium and longer-

term development needs of returning displaced people in a comprehensive and integrated manner. It is area-based and incorporates a community-driven approach and conflict-prevention lens. It additionally seeks to strengthen the linkages between communities and decentralised government and provides capacity building for local government administrations responsible for meeting the immediate and longer-term needs of receiving communities. Over time, it should link to national-level development priorities and budgets.

The 4Rs is, in essence, the reintegration piece of a general transition strategy for countries emerging from violent conflict. As such, it fits neatly within the UN's current efforts to address transition through the UNDG/ECHA (UN Development Group/Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs) Working Group on Transitions and has been lauded as a concrete attempt to operationalise and institutionalise UN inter-agency collaboration.

While some in the community of UN reintegration practitioners may consider the 4Rs a mere re-labelling of existing activities, there is broad agreement that the attempt to systematically institutionalise the process is important in developing a more consistent, reliable process to address the longer-term needs of returning displaced people in every situation of return. Former efforts, while positive, were often driven by

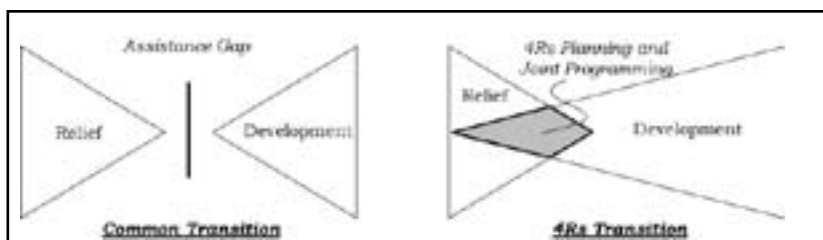
personality or by intersections of various agencies' interests limited to certain country contexts. The 4Rs attempts to make UN efforts less *ad hoc* and more predictable, thus ensuring that agencies involved in post-conflict activities engage, and continue to engage, in an integrated inter-agency planning process at both policy and practice levels.

Sierra Leone

The 4Rs was launched in Sierra Leone some four years after the signing of the Lomé Agreement; ideally, the integrated approach should be launched immediately after cessation of conflict. As part of the 4Rs process, in September 2003 the UN Country Team (UNCT) established a Transition Support Team (TST). The TST answers directly to the UNCT and works closely with the UN peace-keeping mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), all UN field units as well as government district councils and line ministries. It is planned to extend TST support from the initial three regions of highest returns (Kono, Kailahun and Kambia) to cover all regions.

Through the existing coordination mechanisms, TST Field Officers assess gaps in social services, livelihoods and capacity of government authorities at the local level. Specific gaps identified have often been simple but usually have longer-term implications. For example, the TST identified a critical gap in support to the surgical ward in Kailahun District Hospital as the NGO with emergency funding withdrew and long-term European Union funding was not yet available. TST intervention kept the ward open and prevented loss of the

The 4Rs attempts to make UN efforts less ad hoc





Refugees from Sierra Leone register for voluntary repatriation, BO Waterside camp, Liberia.

UNHCR/C Shirley

investment already made. In another example, recognising the lack of capacity in the 14 District Recovery Councils to use available data for prioritising spending, the TST in cooperation with partners provided training on planning, data handling and formulation of district-oriented transition policy papers.

Sri Lanka

Under the 4Rs programme supported by DANIDA in Sri Lanka, ILO, UNDP, UNICEF and UNHCR have adopted an integrated participatory area-based approach linked to the UN and national transition and recovery strategies. It has focused on three selected areas in north-eastern Sri Lanka to support the sustainable return of 345,000 IDPs and 5,000 returning refugees. The areas were chosen because of high levels of returnees, extensive physical destruction of infrastructure, the high degree of vulnerability and poverty and the need to balance support to areas controlled by the Sri Lankan government and by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. Six core areas of intervention have been identified: protection; income generation; community infrastructure; health,

water and sanitation; education; and local governance capacity building. District situational analysis has led to inter-agency district work which outlines how the various agencies link, coordinate and phase in/out over time. The sequence of planned phase-in and phase-out is guided by the overall strategy of the UNCT. The area-based 4Rs approach is promoting cost-effectiveness through sharing of resources, security and technical expertise.

Lessons learned to date

We have realised the importance of:

- early engagement of development actors: if all agencies are involved in initial discussions on repatriation, recovery and longer-term programming, issues can be addressed to ensure that adequate linkages are forged between relief and development initiatives and that there is a smooth transition from the provision of humanitarian aid to sustainable reconstruction and development.
- national ownership and incorporation within national transition strategies
- early involvement of local government authorities in assessments, site visits and monitoring and evaluation: capacity should be built not only in displacement-related ministries but also in all state agencies with longer-term responsibilities.
- community participation: communities should be at the heart of the process, participating in assessments, implementation and monitoring and evaluation.
- availability and accessibility of resources: flexible funds must be made available to the development agencies in transition situations to act as quickly as the more emergency-oriented agencies to set up joint planning structures, open sub-offices (or share in the cost of joint offices), initiate early capacity building and mobilise communities.
- joint planning units, managed by the UN Resident Coordinator (head of the UNCT) to ensure multi-agency 'buy-in': these should eventually cease to exist as integrated planning becomes institutionalised.

- integrated donor support to unite agencies: several donors, specifically the Japanese, Norwegian and Danish, have encouraged a unified approach through innovative funding mechanisms that encourage integrated, joint UN agency proposals.
- flexibility: as post-conflict situations change – especially with regard to security – agencies and donors must remain adaptable and adjust programmes, staff levels and funding as required.
- mutual respect between headquarters and field staff: while agency staff on the ground are best placed to understand the local context and develop response strategies, headquarters staff often intervene as they believe they have a broader perspective. The best approach is a field-driven process in which field-based staff

initiate headquarters involvement by requesting necessary, targeted support.

- common information management systems that incorporate developmentally-relevant data from the outset: early involvement of government authorities in the collection, management and dissemination of information greatly benefits long-term capacity building. Sierra Leone's Information System (SLIS) provides a good example of a system with potential to address this data gap.

Where do we go from here?

The examples of Sri Lanka and Sierra Leone show promising results of UN inter-agency collaboration on comprehensive, integrated planning for sustainable reintegration of displaced populations in post-conflict countries. UNCTs in Angola, Burundi

and Sudan have requested assistance to develop their own integrated strategies and a 4Rs programme has begun in Liberia. In order to improve the prospects of success for new 4Rs initiatives in countries emerging from conflict, much more needs to be done to include NGO partners, record and learn from experience and develop useful tools for those responsible for their development and implementation.

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The views expressed here are personal and do not necessarily represent those of the UN.

Vocational training for returnee girls, FAWE Girls Centre, Grafton, Sierra Leone.

