

## Refugee camps – a food security, livelihood and childhood nutrition assessment at Sinje, Cape Mount County, Liberia, West Africa

D Stevens<sup>1</sup>, AJ Bencke<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Nutrition Consultant and Program Manager, Save the Children, UK

<sup>2</sup>School of Health Sciences, University of Newcastle, NSW, 2308

**Introduction/Objectives** – Liberia and Sierra Leone are two West African countries ravaged by civil war and rebel takeovers. The human cost of more than a decade of killings, civil unrest, and associated miseries is huge and especially vulnerable are the women and children. WFP (World Food Program) are responsible for food aid to most refugee camps in Africa, and inherent in their rationing is the expectation that after a few months, refugees will cultivate, work or barter for some of their food. Sinje, is an established Liberian border refugee camp for 17,000 refugees from Sierra Leone (6,000 settled more than 9 months – Camp 1). WFP wished to reduce the food ration for 11,000 recently arrived refugees (Camp 2) to that of Camp 1 (4,400 kJ/day/person) which is 4000 kJ/day/person below WFP/UNHCR recommendations. Young children are at greatest risk of malnutrition and their rates are a marker for food insecurity. Many refugees have endured months of forced relocation due to unrest, before arriving at Sinje. The aim of this study was to determine the impact of the recent arrivals on food security and livelihood and childhood malnutrition and assess the effect that the proposed ration reduction may have on Camp 2.

**Design** – Cross sectional study involving systematic sampling of 318 households (eating from the same pot), utilisation of the food ration (bulgur wheat, pulses and oil), access to other sources of food and income. Anthropometric measurements of every child (6 months to 5 years) in the household, and rations supplied were recorded. Structured interviews were conducted by Liberian nationals predominantly trained and employed by Save the Children UK (responsible for monitoring food security in this region). Open ended questions concerning family savings, assets and wages, as well as intentions of returning to Sierra Leone were also posed.

**Outcomes** – Camp 1 refugees were food insecure if relying just on their rations (< 4400 kJ/person daily), but most households had developed livelihood strategies to gain more food, whilst Camp 2 was food secure on the current ration of 8800 kJ/person daily, but with few livelihood opportunities to supplement their ration in the long term. Other measures were not significantly different.

	Camp 1	Camp 2
Number of households sampled	112	206
Female headed households	47%	46%
Childhood malnutrition – global	4.4%	2.7%
Stunting in children (high: > 30%, WHO)	38%	39%

**Conclusions and Recommendations** – Female headed households are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity, and most likely to resort to distress strategies eg sale of meagre assets and high interest loans. Refugees need job creation, mini marketing, and micro-banks. Farming as a livelihood is unattractive, as most refugees want to return home and the huge influx has reduced availability of land. Stunting rates, a result of long term food insecurity, may be reduced by improving other livelihood opportunities. Reduction in ration in Camp 2, whilst important to promote self reliance, should be postponed until other livelihood strategies are in place.