

NEW ISSUES IN REFUGEE RESEARCH

Working Paper No. 22

International refugee aid and social change in northern Mali

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July 2000

These working papers provide a means for UNHCR staff, consultants, interns and associates to publish the preliminary results of their research on refugee-related issues. The papers do not represent the official views of UNHCR.

ISSN 1020-7473

Introduction

It has long been recognised that the experience of forced migration can lead to profound social transformations among the persons who have been displaced. Among the multiplicity of factors engendering such change, attention must be given to the impact of international aid and development programmes designed to benefit refugee or returnee communities. The wider the cultural difference between the traditional lifestyle of the beneficiaries and the approach adopted by the aid agencies, the greater the impact of such programmes is likely to be.

This paper constitutes a case study of one such situation by focusing upon the experience of persons forcibly displaced as a result of the armed conflict which took place in northern Mali between 1990 and 1995. Many of the refugees involved belonged to an ancient nomadic culture and, until their exodus, had had only sporadic contact with the services aid agencies and modern governmental institutions are able to provide.

The findings of the article are principally based upon interviews conducted with some 200 returnees at selected sites in the Timbuktu and Kidal regions of northern Mali in the summer of 1998. These were originally undertaken for the purpose of evaluating the UNHCR repatriation programme (see Sperl, 1998). The article concludes with a number of recommendations concerning the design and implementation of refugee and returnee assistance programmes in a developmental context.

Background

The interface between refugee aid and social change in northern Mali must be seen in the wider context of the profound, and in many ways disastrous, social, political, economic and environmental changes which have affected the area for several decades prior to the refugee exodus. The result has been a progressive disruption of the fragile agro-pastoralist equilibrium upon which the livelihood of the area depends and which involves several different ethnic groups: the largely nomadic Touareg and their African clients, the Bella; the Arab traders known as Moors; and the largely sedentary Songhoy who live along the Niger valley.

The destabilisation of northern Mali was the long term consequence of three principal factors. First of all, French colonial rule and the subsequent rise of nation states in the Saharan region decisively weakened the Touareg tribes and ended their control of the trans-Saharan caravan trade which had been a major source of income for them. The second factor is the environmental degradation brought about by 25 years of low rainfall between 1965 and 1990 which worsened into the catastrophic droughts of 1973 and 1984 and further destroyed the traditional livelihood of numerous nomadic clans. Finally, there was the marginalisation of the North by the Malian government in the years following independence in 1960. While the North comprises 70 per cent of the country's territory it only harbours 10 per cent of the population, and governmental investment in this vast region remained minimal.

The result of this combination of factors was the build up of an increasingly militant opposition particularly among certain groups of young men in the Touareg areas of the

far North East (Kidal and Menaka) who came to be known as *ishumar*.¹ In 1963 a first rebellion in Kidal was harshly put down and led to the imposition of military rule in the area. The much more well-organised rebellion of 1990, sparked off by a parallel uprising in northern Niger, was spearheaded by Touareg combatants who had earlier migrated to Libya in search for work and received military training there. The fighting led to the flight of some 150,000 persons from Mali to Algeria, Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Niger between 1990 and 1994. Virtually all of these were of Touareg or Moorish origin.

Attempts were made early on to secure a peaceful resolution of the conflict (for details see Papendiek, 1998 and Poulton, 1998). Already in 1991, a *Pacte National* was signed between the Government of Mali and the MFUA (*Mouvement des Fronts Unifiés pour l'Azawad*) which represented the various Touareg and Arab factions that had taken up arms. The agreement provides for a cessation of hostilities, the return of displaced persons and refugees and the integration of the ex-combatants into the Malian army, while stipulating better political representation and a ten year development plan for the northern regions.

Despite the signature of the pact hostilities intensified and it was not until 1995 that security conditions significantly improved. Taking account of its commitments under the pact the Government in July that year convened the Round Table Conference of Timbuktu in which donors and development agencies were presented with a comprehensive rehabilitation programme for northern Mali. A year later, in April 1996, the arms surrendered by the warring militias were burnt in Timbuktu at a ceremony known as *la flamme de la paix* which marked the official end of the armed conflict in the North.

The consolidation of the peace process agreed at the Timbuktu Round Table involved complementary roles for UNDP and UNHCR. The former was to create a Trust Fund to assist in the demobilisation and reintegration of ex-combatants² while UNHCR was to take charge of the repatriation and reintegration of the refugees. Both initiatives had the full support of the authorities in Bamako, not least President Konaré himself who was instrumental in the search for a peaceful solution to the conflict. The constructive attitude of the authorities is born out by the virtual absence of protection problems among the returnees.

The repatriation began with spontaneous returns in early 1995 and ended in November 1998 with movements that were almost entirely UNHCR assisted. The latter were of two kinds: facilitated movements in which returnees received pre-departure assistance but organised their own transportation; and organised movements which took place with UNHCR supplied transport. Many facilitated returns involved nomadic herdsmen with their flocks while organised returns concerned principally vulnerable groups and urban refugees. Pre-departure assistance consisted of a three month food ration as well as tarpaulins and domestic items.

¹ The term is derived from the French *chaumeur* and was first used in colonial times to refer to the Touareg tribesmen who congregated in the Algerian oases in search for work after the demise of the caravans (see Hawad, 1991).

² For details see Seydoux, 1997.

The official UNHCR returnee statistics for the period April 1995 to November 1998 are as follows:

	<i>Organised</i>	<i>Facilitated</i>	<i>Spontaneous</i>	<i>Total</i>
Mauritania	18,656	21,041	4,015	43,712
Burkina Faso	4,710	16,375	2,877	23,962
Algeria	7,691	265	42,748	50,704
Niger	1,091	2,928	8,704	12,723
Senegal	679	0	0	679
<i>Total</i>	<i>32,827</i>	<i>40,609</i>	<i>58,344</i>	<i>131,780</i>

Though not altogether reliable, these figures do provide an overall impression of the type and number of returnee movements per country of asylum. The total level of forced displacement brought about by the conflict is likely to have been much higher, however, and the number of formerly uprooted persons residing in the returnee sites assisted by the UNHCR programme has been estimated at 305,000. This amounts to no less than 25 per cent of the total estimated population of northern Mali.

Assistance in the camps

Most of the informants interviewed for the purpose of this paper had returned home after prolonged stays in the refugee camps of Mauritania and Algeria. They gave very different assessments of their experience. The camps in Mauritania had been well supplied and well administered, with UNHCR, WFP and NGO Offices located in immediate proximity. In Algeria, on the other hand, there had been repeated shortages of food supplies and the camps were tightly controlled and regimented which made the refugees feel under siege; moreover, on account of the security problems in the country no permanent international presence could be maintained in the vicinity.

Accordingly, the Algerian camps were described as providing for little more than physical survival in exile while the camps in Mauritania were seen in a far more favourable light. Not only were they praised on account of the generous level of assistance made available but special mention was made by many returnees of the education, literacy and training programmes organised in the camps which, they said, had helped them significantly in rebuilding their lives after repatriation.³

Greatest emphasis was placed upon the usefulness of adult training programmes which had been implemented by a number of NGOs, in particular Médecins sans Frontières, Médecins du Monde and World Vision. The medical agencies had engaged in training primary health care workers while World Vision implemented a large programme for

³ For a more detailed account of the favourable conditions and the refugees' learning experience in the Mauritanian camps see Rocksloh-Papendiek, 1999 (p.9-11), which contains an interview with a returnee woman who spent five years in Bassikounou.

refuge women. Some 2,400 of them were given access to a variety of programmes covering sewing, cloth-dying, market gardening, small business management and functional literacy in Tamacheq and Arabic. Most of them had some prior knowledge of sewing and cloth-dying skills but the programme introduced them to new techniques which they would be able to put to commercial use.

The women's programmes had an impact upon the social life in the camps, both among the nomadic Touareg and the more urban Moorish refugees. As one observer wrote (Ould Sidi Mohamed, 1996, p.2):

The nomad women, having become health workers, midwives and having learnt to read, write and improve their manual skills feel more emancipated and independent. They work in organised groups, sell their produce in the market and support their husbands who look after the flocks. The sedentary women, who were previously locked up and kept out of sight, are assuming a more dominant role in the family and are taking the place of their idle husbands who have become empty shells in their eyes. The men only know how to trade which was their profession in Mali and now just spend their time seeking news about conditions back home.

That the technical and organisational skills acquired in the camps were of more lasting significance could be witnessed by a follow-up mission which visited several returnee sites in the Goundam Region West of Timbuktu⁴ in 1996 and found that women trained in the Mauritanian camps had taken the initiative to establish small scale commercial enterprises to supplement the family income (see World Vision 1996, Annex 3). When I visited the same area two years later, in the summer of 1998, I found that these women's cooperatives were still in existence and appeared to be functioning well. They had in the meanwhile been able to benefit from further support by the returnee programme.

The returnees' positive assessment of the experience gained in the camps was occasioned also by the availability of a well functioning programme of primary education which allowed some 5,000 refugee children access to schooling in Arabic and French. In their country of origin, many of these children would not have had such an opportunity since the educational infrastructure in northern Mali is exceedingly poor. According to government figures only 22.3 per cent of school age children attend classes, and of that percentage the majority reside in urban areas; in rural areas from which most of the refugees originated there are often no functioning schools at all (UNDP 1998, p.12). The situation was compounded by the hostile attitude to schooling among nomadic communities who tended to perceive it as an irrelevant and potentially dangerous encroachment on their traditional lifestyle.⁵ The disruption of this very

⁴ The sites concerned were Solima, Sorassane, Gargando, Léré and Aratène.

⁵ On the challenge of introducing formal education among the nomadic Touareg see the articles by M.A.Ag Ataher Insar, M.Gast and E.Ag Foni in Claudot-Hawad 1991. A characteristic insight into the traditional Touareg attitude to the subject is found in a novel by the Libyan Touareg author Ibrahim al-Kuni one of whose characters offers the following advice to a young man bent on leaving his tribe in search for schooling: "What do you need learning for, my son? What does the desert need learning and

lifestyle due to the rebellion and the resulting loss of livestock, combined with first hand experience of the benefits of education as witnessed in the camps led to a change of attitude among many nomadic refugees who returned to Mali with the hope that better educational opportunities would be made available for their children also in their country of origin. The same could be said about health services which again were better in the camps than anything the rural refugees had known before their exodus.

The Mauritanian experience has a bearing on the ongoing debate on the relative merits and demerits of refugee camps.⁶ The reports given by Malian returnees clearly demonstrate that there is a profound difference between camps conceived merely as holding centres for survival and camps which provide their residents with the means to acquire knowledge and skills which will help them to rebuild their lives better once the refugee situation ends. The problem is that initiatives of the latter kind are in many cases insufficient and, with the exception of primary education for children, are given relatively low priority compared to other sectors. In this respect it is symptomatic that even in the positive situation of Mauritania, the training programmes were introduced only in 1994, three years after the arrival of the refugees. They were also the first assistance programmes to be discontinued once the momentum towards repatriation developed. In the circumstances, the training courses had to be concluded in a hurry and their impact was less effective than it might have been.

The UNHCR-WFP returnee programme

The most important country-wide initiative to help in the reconstruction of civilian life in northern Mali was undoubtedly the UNHCR funded returnee assistance programme which was implemented in collaboration with WFP and eleven NGO implementing partners. The statistics of the programme make impressive reading. Between 1995 and June 1999 when the programme ended assistance was provided in no less than 638 sites throughout northern Mali; 287 wells were dug or rehabilitated, 123 boreholes drilled and numerous solar or diesel water pumps installed. Food distributions and food for work programmes were organised and loans and grants made available to large numbers of individuals and local associations.

Despite a seriously delayed start the overall impact of the programme appears to have contributed to the creation of a new social equilibrium among the communities which had been torn apart by the rebellion. Two principle factors enabled this to be the case: the integrated community focus adopted by the programme and the returnee driven approach to the selection of sites for rehabilitation.

scholars? There may be no harm in it but there is no benefit either as far as the desert is concerned. You are not looking for knowledge, you are only looking for yourself and if you don't find yourself in the desert you won't find it anywhere. So stay with us and forget these illusions" (al-Kuni 1991, p.36).

⁶ For details see *Forced Migration Review*, No.2 (1998), which was dedicated to this question, as well as the response by Crisp and Jacobsen (1998).

Site selection and the rise of new communities

Access to water was the chief problem faced by the returnees, in particular those bound for rural areas. Numerous sites had become uninhabitable because wells had been deliberately destroyed during the rebellion; in other cases, wells had silted up in the years following their departure into exile. Without adequate water resources the rehabilitation of the returnees could not even have begun.

In adopting their strategy on dealing with this matter, the Government of Mali and UNHCR decided early on to leave the choice of sites to be rehabilitated entirely to the returnees themselves, provided certain basic criteria were met relating in particular to the number of people bound for any one site. On the one hand, this had considerable drawbacks: returnees frequently changed their minds (partly because of implementation delays), many sites turned out to be located in remote and seemingly deserted areas, and the number of sites involved grew beyond all expectations. This led to considerable complications and delays. With hindsight it is clear that criteria and cut-off dates for the choice of sites could have been more rigorously enforced.

However, the positive consequences of the policy far outweigh the negative ones for it enabled the returnees to choose their new locations in accordance with their own priorities. It certainly did much to facilitate the surprising number of new communities which sprang up as people opted to return to sites which they had not occupied before the exodus. A mission visiting returnees from Burkina Faso, for instance, found that only one site out of nine harboured returnees who had lived there before. Numerous reasons are given for the proliferation of new sites but certain trends prevail: returnees of urban origin often did not want to go back to their former places of residence because of the reprisals they had suffered there; and many returnees of nomadic background were forced by the loss of their livestock to select sites that allowed for a more settled lifestyle.⁷

Integrated community focus

UNHCR staff planning the Malian returnee programme were faced with a familiar dilemma. While the mandate of the organisation requires that its intervention should be limited to returning refugees only the needs of the local population in the returnee areas are often no less great than those of the returnees themselves. In such situations the

⁷ A notable example is provided by the group of Moorish traders who, instead of returning to their native Timbuktu, preferred to settle in the nearby hamlet of Nebkit Ilik which they have since turned into a thriving centre of local commerce. Another case concerns Koygma, once a denuded hill in the wilderness which now harbours an assembly of former nomads who struck up an alliance in the refugee camps and decided to follow their new leader to this isolated spot where a well could only be installed with considerable difficulty. Yet another case is Hambuba, a new suburb of the oasis of Tessalit comprising groups of returnees from Algeria whose settlement appears on course to become larger than Tessalit itself.

application of restrictive assistance criteria could have a divisive effect and lead to frictions between locals and the returnees.

In the case of the Malian programme UNHCR and WFP opted, after a prolonged period of hesitation and uncertainty, for an inclusive approach. It was decided to combine the distribution of a three months food ration destined only for returnees with a range of other tangible measures targeted at communities as whole, so as to include the many settled and internally displaced persons living in the returnee areas who were also in a precarious economic situation. The measures envisaged comprised complementary food rations for vulnerable groups, the distribution of non-food items (soap, blankets, tarpaulins etc.), food for work programmes and micro-projects in a variety of sectors.

The integrated focus of the project was consolidated by the adoption of a decentralised decision-making structure which assigned responsibility to commit project funds to some 20 committees convened at district level which included representatives of the local population. The guidelines governing the use of funds were drawn up to allow for flexibility so as to enable the committees to tailor the programme specifically to local needs and priorities. Implementation was delegated to 11 NGO partners who assumed responsibility for designated geographical zones.

A significant aspect of the integrated approach adopted by UNHCR and WFP concerned their decision, again taking after some considerable delay, to extend support to the so called *rencontres intercommunautaires*, large local community gatherings of traditional leaders, government representatives, former refugees and members of the parties involved in the armed conflict. In many localities throughout the North these meetings proved instrumental in easing the way towards renewed coexistence and reconciliation. Support for similar intercommunal initiatives should become an integral and accepted part of returnee programmes in general, a fact which stresses once more the need for a community-wide focus in assistance activities aimed at the reintegration of returnees in a post-conflict environment.

Achievements and limitations

The comments made by the returnees interviewed in the summer of 1998 show that the assistance package provided by UNHCR and WFP had brought some benefits even to the remotest parts of the country. There were, however, certain shortcomings. Geographical coverage was uneven and reflected the varying capacity of NGO implementing partners as well as the difficulties brought about by environmental and security constraints in certain particularly disadvantaged areas such as Kidal and Gourma-Rharous. Donor response to the programme was less generous than expected and the overall funding input can only be described as insufficient in the light of the needs.

A major constraint in the design of the programme concerned the decision not to support measures to help in the rehabilitation of livestock for the pastoralist communities. It was felt that this was a long term developmental challenge for which the humanitarian agencies at hand did not have the necessary expertise. As a result, the assistance measures provided by the programme favoured sedentarisation at the expense of

pastoralism despite the fact that this had been the traditional occupation of many beneficiaries. Implicit in this policy may have been the assumption that sedentarisation was the complement of an inevitable process of modernisation which the programme was there to support and consolidate. However, the policy also went to the detriment of the many semi-nomadic and newly sedentarised communities whose livelihood still depends on animal husbandry as the soil conditions in this arid zone rarely lend themselves to sustained agricultural production.

Moreover, many former nomads deeply regretted the change of lifestyle forced upon them by the loss of their herds. The following comment by the leader of a returnee women's association in Tessalit is symptomatic: "the only thing we really lack is our animals; before, we were alone in the desert and neither Mali nor Algeria knew of us; now we have become a pinball between states and we are dying a slow death". A study undertaken by UNHCR in summer 1999 noted that some returnee groups would have much preferred receiving sheep and goats rather than all the other benefits provided by the programme; it was also found that those communities who had managed to preserve their livestock did best while many of those who had lost it continued to depend on humanitarian aid (UNHCR 1999, p.6-8).

This leads to perhaps the most serious constraint of the programme, namely its short-term nature. In keeping with the limited reintegration mandate of UNHCR the programme was phased out in mid-1999 despite the fact that the situation in many parts of northern Mali remains exceedingly fragile. This applies in particular to the newly sedentarised communities of former nomads whose ability to grow their own food is severely constrained by lack of infrastructure, irrigation and agricultural know-how. Moreover, an effective governmental presence, including basic services, has not yet been (re)established in many regions of the North which in turn impedes the involvement of international agencies with a longer-term developmental agenda.

Aware of these difficulties UNHCR attempted in the final year of its repatriation programme in Mali to secure the cooperation of partners willing to continue the work that had been started and thus bridge the gap between humanitarian and development aid for the benefit of the most vulnerable communities. While it is too early to assess the success of these efforts attention has to be given to one notable example where such continuity turned out to be fully assured. This is the *Programme Mali-Nord* (PMN) funded by the German Agency *Gesellschaft für technische Zusammenarbeit* (GTZ).

The Programme Mali-Nord (PMN)

The PMN is a remarkable aid and development programme which was designed from the outset to cater both for immediate emergency needs as well as longer-term reconstruction. It can be said to illustrate all the conditions a project needs to fulfill in order to provide an optimal framework for returnee rehabilitation in a developing country. They can be summarised as follows:

Integrated area coverage

The area selected for the project covers a cohesive socio-economic zone in the Timbuktu Region encompassing the territory stretching from the northern shore of the Niger river towards the Mauritanian border. It constitutes a bridge between localities frequented primarily by nomads and others housing sedentary populations. The two groups had been opposed during the armed conflict with the result that the nomadic populations departed into exile and normal economic interaction came to a halt. By selecting a zone of intervention which cut across the lines of conflict the project was able to demonstrate its non-alignment with the conflicting parties. An added advantage of this strategy was the ability of the project to counterbalance the assistance provided for returnee communities by UNHCR and its partners with parallel measures destined for the sedentary populations of the area who had not been compelled to move.

Multi-year approach

The programme was operational already in early 1995 before UNHCR arrived at the scene; it subsequently acted as regional implementing partner for the UNHCR-WFP returnee programme between 1996 and 1998 and, upon the termination of that programme, provided further continuity by catering for longer-term development needs. The long-term planning horizon adopted by the project thus made it possible to establish an uninterrupted transition from the emergency to the later development oriented stages while incorporating the UNHCR input for as long as it was available.

Multi-sector coverage

Following the emergency phase which was characterised by the distribution of food and shelter materials and the support for community reconciliation meetings⁸, the project focused on two key development objectives: the rehabilitation of basic infrastructure and the creation of food security. A large number of labour-intensive measures were undertaken for the purpose, including the construction of schools, health posts and communal buildings, as well as the irrigation and cultivation of arable land along the shore of the Niger river and the establishment of pastoral wells. The multi-sectoral approach adopted by the project enabled it to give balanced attention to different types of rehabilitation needs.

Community participation

The administrative structure of the project ensures an optimal level of participation by the local community both in decision making and in the execution of individual works. Expatriate staff consist only of two experts based in Bamako who designed and ran the project from its beginning. Ten field offices were opened in key localities under the leadership of local staff members selected to reflect the ethnic diversity of the region.

⁸ A notable example is the *recontre intercommunautaire* which was held at M'Bouna in September 1995. The meeting had 2,000 participants, including representatives from refugee camps, and paved the way for repatriation to the large Goundam region west of Timbuktu (see Papendiek, 1998 and Tombouctou, 1995).

Their task is to decide upon the use of project funds in consultation with the beneficiaries themselves who are asked to identify needs and provide whatever unskilled labour may be required for the execution of the works.

The management of the project thus exhibits two distinct features not often encountered together in the implementation of international development aid. At the expatriate level there is a combination of great skill, economy in number and continuity of presence which contrasts with the frequent rotation of relatively inexperienced staff that is a feature of so many other projects. At the local level on the other hand, responsibility for the identification and execution of individual activities is delegated to the maximum extent to the beneficiaries and their immediate counterparts thus ensuring a sense of ownership and a high degree of motivation. There is no doubt that this approach is a key ingredient of the success of the project.

Administrative autonomy

While the project has a governmental counterpart at central level in the Ministry of Environment the project is not subject to normal governmental disbursement or tendering procedures. This ensures a maximum degree of speed and flexibility in project implementation which in turn has given the project a high level of credibility among the local population.

The positive impact of the PMN was strongly in evidence in all the localities I visited in the summer of 1998. When the returnees were asked to compare their living conditions before and after the exodus they were unanimous in stating that their lives had improved after their return because they had found new sources of revenue and received a previously unknown degree of support, particularly in the all-important water and irrigation sector. Responses received to the same question in the other regions of the country region were far less favourable. These positive findings were confirmed by an independent evaluation of the project commissioned by the parent agency GTZ in late 1998 (see Riedel, 1999).

The evaluation report noted in particular the remarkable increase in school attendance by both boys and girls in the nomadic zones of the project area which also benefited from a widespread programme to repair and increase the number of wells providing water for human consumption, livestock and vegetable gardening.⁹ Perhaps the most significant contribution of the PMN, however, is to be found along the shores of the Niger river where some 2,000 hectares of land have been irrigated for a rice and wheat cultivation project which was found to be economically viable and to make a significant contribution to local food security. This sector of the project has created a sustainable source of income and employment for the area as a whole, including numerous former nomads.

⁹ The total number of village and pastoral wells put into working order, almost exclusively by local well builders and contractors, exceeded 200 in all. In addition, UNHCR provided the necessary equipment to drill 14 boreholes in difficult locations (see Riedel 1999, pp. 21-2, 24-5).

While in many parts of northern Mali the transition from a traditional subsistence economy to a more modern sedentarised lifestyle is proving to be perilous and crisis-ridden, in the PMN area these difficulties have been eased significantly. This has greatly helped in the reintegration of the returnees and reestablishment of communal solidarity following the trauma of the rebellion. In the light of these achievements the German government has since authorised the use of further development funding to provide for an expanded continuation of the project until the year 2003.

Conclusions

The experience of Mali shows that appropriately designed refugee and returnee assistance can contribute significantly to an ongoing process of social change. The assistance measures undertaken have significantly influenced the beneficiaries' attitude and expectations; they have imparted new skills, helped to transform the social role of women, encouraged community organisation, accelerated the sedentarisation process and facilitated the establishment of new communities. Two distinct sets of conclusions arise from this experience, one concerning assistance measures in camp situations, the other concerning the design of reintegration assistance.

Residence in refugee camps, undesirable as such, should be treated as an opportunity to provide the residents with new or upgraded skills so as to help them reconstruct their livelihood when the opportunity arises. To this effect education, training and literacy programmes aimed at *all* sectors of the population should not, as so often, be seen as ancillary but as vital, primary and no less important than the provision of food and health care. The design of such programmes clearly requires a sophisticated understanding of relevant skills and training profiles and may necessitate much research including close contacts with the country of origin. The example of the Mauritanian camps shows, however, how worthwhile such efforts can be in the long run.

Concerning reintegration assistance a number of basic principles can be formulated in the light of the foregoing. While none of them are in themselves new the fact that they have often been disregarded or, as in the Malian case, have had to be reinvented under duress, makes it worth restating them here. Assistance measures designed to facilitate the reintegration of returnees should be:

- conceived from the outset as an integrated interagency package; while this involves primarily UNHCR and WFP, related rehabilitation measures undertaken by other agencies (such as the UNDP-funded programme for demobilised combatants in Mali) should also form part of the overall design.
- targeted not at individual returnees but at whole communities, including internally displaced and residents who did not leave.
- community-driven through a decentralised decision-making process which allows local committees a maximum say in the allocation of funds; where nomadic or semi-

nomadic communities are involved the programme should specifically include measures to help in the rehabilitation of livestock.

- designed to include from the outset assistance for community reconciliation initiatives undertaken by civil society such the *rencontres intercommunautaires*.
- be conceived as developmental and longer term from the outset; this is particularly important when the repatriation process is accompanied by major social and economic transformations in an environment of extreme scarcity and political fragility as was the case in Mali.

Experience has shown that the last of these criteria is the most difficult to fulfill. It requires the presence of competent, well-funded implementing partners ready to engage in a commitment which goes much beyond the limited input UNHCR is able to provide. There can be no doubt that the approach developed by the GTZ funded *Programme Mali-Nord* is exemplary in this respect.

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