

SPCP- Benin/Burkina Faso

Update

September, 2006

Background

The Strengthening Protection Capacity Project began in Benin and Burkina Faso in February 2005, with an initial grant of money from the European Commission, and three co-funding states: Denmark, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The initial project money enabled the SPCP in to: (i) conduct and publish a comprehensive analysis of protection gaps in the two countries; (ii) undertake a comprehensive assessment of present livelihood strategies of refugees and propose means to improve self-reliance (iii) convene a national consultation with all concerned stakeholders to prioritize the gaps identified and recommend measures to remedy them; (iv) subsequently work with partners to develop projects necessary to implement an agreed upon Plan of Action for the coming years; (v) implement a number of quick impact projects and; (vi) continue to engage donors in the funding of initiatives necessary to fully implement the Plan of Action.

Achievements

The SPCP-Benin/Burkina Faso initial project funding ended in April 2006, by which time all the objectives noted above had been achieved. The National Consultations resulted in the adoption of comprehensive plans of action, and subsequently the development of projects to remedy the gaps identified. A number of these projects were implemented from the SPCP pilot project budget.

To date the following SPCP projects have commenced:

Favourable Protection Environment

Expanded Partnerships

New partners have been identified to address some of the gaps identified in the gaps report.

- The NGO, Prospectour, has offered preferential tuition costs to refugees for different professional skills training programs, and a pilot project with a limited number of refugees is underway.
- Moreover, UNHCR and its partner CPPS asked PADME, one of the major micro-credit providers in Benin, to participate in a pilot project for a specific group of refugees. Although PADME has historically rejected the inclusion of non-nationals in its programmes, our Regional Representation in Benin believes that as part of the SPCP activities some positive movement from that position may be forthcoming.
- Negotiations are under way with Respect International, an international NGO, which will, together with an association of refugee students and parents, provide AIDS/HIV prevention and counselling in Kpomasse camp.
- In addition, the funding of SPCP QIPs (below) has reinforced refugee women's organizations, which in Conotou will launch a day-care centre. The SPCP funded community centres, moreover, provide office meeting and working spaces for refugee women's organizations.

Communication

- Procedures and conditions for receiving the different forms of assistance have been clarified, clearly articulated and posted on office notice boards. Similarly, the conditions for resettlement are also publicly posted.

Fair and Efficient Refugee Status Determination

Strengthening RSD capacity of the Appeals Committee (Benin)

- Training provided to the members of the Appeals Committee which is now functional. The decisions on status/appeals are well founded and documented.
- To ensure transparency and consistency and in order to inform later committees, a jurisprudence dossier is being prepared.
- UNHCR organised an evaluation of the reception of refugees and has put in place some of the changes proposed by the refugees. A similar evaluation of the reception of refugees by our partners CARITAS, CPPS and CREDO is being carried out.

Strengthening RSD capacity of the Refugee Status Commission (Burkina Faso)

- A detailed strategy has been developed for strengthening the capacity of the Government of Burkina Faso to undertake refugee status determination. The protection gaps in the current process were among the priorities cited at the national consultations. A project submission has been developed and waits funding before the work can commence.

Admission in Safety and Registration

Registration -Benin

- This project was undertaken in two stages. The first at the end of 2005 and the beginning of 2006 which, among other things accomplished the following:
 - Installed the new registration and protection case processing application, ProGres.
 - Trained staff on the use of the new application as well as on overall registration principles and standards.
 - Reviewed Standard Operating Procedures for: Registration, Refugee Status Determination, Resettlement and Continuous Registration, in such a way as to make them compatible with the new application.
 - Moved the existing registration data to the new application.
 - Configured the new and existing equipment in Benin operation for the use of ProGres.
 - Provided support for the pilot refugee data verification exercise in the Come refugee camp using ProGres.
- The second stage commenced in February 2006 and concluded by completing the registration and verification exercise of the Togolese camp based refugees and extended the verification and improvements to the registration system to the urban refugee caseload in Cotonou.

Essential Services

Education

- Scholarships (Burkina Faso): A commission was put in place to select the beneficiaries of the scholarship. The commission was composed of CREDO, CONAREF, CRBF, and MCC. Seven beneficiaries were selected on the basis of their dossiers.

Ability to Achieve Self-Reliance

Community Centres

- Community Centres were established in Ouagadougou and Contonu to host the offices of several refugee organizations. An income-generating project for women will be established in the atelier in order to provide assistance to the most vulnerable group of women. In Benin, a second centre was also leased to provide an atelier where refugees can make products and sell them.

Challenges

In Benin and Burkina Faso, where difficult economic circumstances affect local communities and refugees alike, self-reliance strategies need to be reinforced. This in turn requires an expertise not easily found among traditional partners working with refugees. Ways to fully engage other actors, already stretched in service delivery to local citizens, need to be found to ensure that a critical refugee protection gap, the inability to achieve self-reliance, is remedied.