

Finding durable solutions

Millions of refugees around the world live with little hope of finding a durable solution to their plight. Addressing this problem is part of UNHCR's core mandate. However, UNHCR cannot do it alone, especially when it comes to protracted refugee situations in which finding durable solutions requires concerted international action. In 2006, UNHCR devoted resources to working closely with governments, humanitarian agencies, development partners and refugees to fulfil its durable solutions mandate.

Global Strategic Objective 3.a: Support, facilitate or promote voluntary repatriation movements

UNHCR's voluntary repatriation and reintegration operations provided solutions for tens of thousands of refugees, including those previously trapped in protracted situations. In 2006, about 733,000 refugees are estimated to have returned to their countries of origin voluntarily, at least half of them with UNHCR's assistance. Of particular note in 2006 were the assisted returns of more than 139,000 Afghan refugees from Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran; more than 29,000 refugees from seven neighbouring countries back to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC); and some 40,000 Liberian refugees from Guinea and Sierra Leone.

To provide guidance to the Field on the standards and procedures that apply to voluntary repatriation, the Division of International Protection Services (DIPS) revised UNHCR's *Handbook on Voluntary Repatriation*, which had been last updated in 1996. Publication is expected in 2007. DIPS is also bringing out an inter-agency handbook on the well-known "Pinheiro Principles" on restitution of housing, land and property for refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). This handbook will be printed in mid-2007.

Repatriation cannot succeed in the longer term without effective reintegration programmes. UNHCR Headquarters provided technical support, often in partnership with UN development agencies, for key reintegration operations in Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, the DRC, Liberia and Sudan. In the case of Liberia, of the 43,000 refugees who returned to the country, more than 70 per cent returned to a single county, Lofa, to which many IDPs returned as well. To create conditions to sustain the returns, UNHCR distributed seeds and tools, ran microcredit schemes, repaired educational and health infrastructure in a labour-intensive manner, distributed shelter kits and carried out income-generating programmes with a focus on women and youth.

In Angola, UNHCR compiled seven municipal profiles to analyse the economic and social conditions in returnee-affected municipalities and to assess the



139,000 Afghan refugees returned home with UNHCR's assistance in 2006.

UNHCR/B. Baloch

essential needs of the returnees and local communities. These profiles were used by development agencies to rationalize interventions in return areas. In the DRC, a similar village assessment and mapping project carried out by UNHCR facilitated the planning of development interventions in returnee areas.

Global Objective 3.b: Enhance resettlement as a protection tool and durable solution

To highlight the importance of resettlement, and particularly its strategic use to achieve other solutions or widen the asylum space in host countries, the profile of UNHCR's Resettlement Section was raised to that of a service in 2006. Through this upgrade, UNHCR has demonstrated its commitment to strengthening the global coordination of resettlement.

Worldwide, approximately 53,000 refugees were referred for resettlement in 2006, an increase of some 15 per cent from 2005 and some 50 per cent from 2003. However, only some 29,200 refugees actually departed. This large discrepancy between submissions and departures was mainly attributable to resettlement processing in Thailand, which saw more than 19,000 refugees presented for resettlement but only about 4,700 able to depart. The difference was due to national security-related bars to admission to the United States, which were waived only during the third quarter of 2006. Hence, decisions on many cases were still pending by the end of the year.

To resettle refugees more efficiently, UNHCR used group and profiling methods. The group method was used to process the applications of three refugee groups in Africa: survivors of the August 2004 massacre at the Gatumba refugee camp in Burundi; the "1972 Burundians" (refugees who have had to flee many times and are presently in refugee camps in Tanzania); and a group of Eritrean refugees of Kunama ethnicity living in Ethiopia. The profiling method was used to find solutions for Somali refugees in camps in Kenya. It is expected that this will generate a significant number of resettlement submissions from Kenya.

Advances were also made throughout 2006 with regard to the resettlement of other refugee groups. Myanmar refugees in Thailand were proposed for resettlement on a group basis. The waiver of certain national security-related bars to admission in the United States for many of the affected refugees also meant that 4,000 ethnic Chins from Myanmar currently in Malaysia would be considered for resettlement in 2007. In Nepal, UNHCR discussed with the Government the possibility of resettlement of refugees, some of whom have been in the country since 1990. While there was no group resettlement activity for this group in 2006, some extremely vulnerable individuals were accepted for

resettlement. A census, which should help identify individuals at risk and in need of resettlement, began in November 2006.

Planning has begun for a major resettlement programme for refugees in and from Iraq, a response to the flight of an estimated two million people from the country by the end of the year. An expedited procedure for registration and preparation of resettlement registration forms devised and agreed by major resettlement countries. This resettlement programme, which is to be implemented in 2007, will be a major undertaking. It will involve a number of operations in countries hosting large groups of refugees from Iraq in the Middle East. It is anticipated that up to 20,000 Iraqi refugees will be identified for resettlement in 2007.

Since the June 2006 Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement and the October Working Group on Resettlement, UNHCR has made concerted efforts to strengthen the role of NGOs in resettlement. The Resettlement Service has opened its regional meetings and training events to NGO participants. Furthermore, the service has worked closely with NGOs to explore new ways to identify and refer refugees in need of resettlement to UNHCR.

Under a deployment scheme, UNHCR and the International Catholic Migration Commission have sought to boost the participation of specialized NGOs in UNHCR's resettlement operations. The Resettlement Service reviews the candidates to be recruited under the scheme. It is anticipated that UNHCR offices in countries of resettlement will play a bigger role in the recruitment of experts to the scheme.

Global Objective 3.c: Strengthen local integration as a durable solution and promote self-reliance in stabilized situations

In 2005, UNHCR's Executive Committee (ExCom) highlighted the importance of local integration in durable solution strategies. This gave impetus to local integration initiatives throughout UNHCR's global operations as field offices established comprehensive durable solutions strategies. Local integration initiatives were supported throughout 2006. Significant progress was achieved in Europe (where a regional strategy for Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine was established), Africa (see text box below) and Asia (Tajikistan and Papua New Guinea).

Local integration is a complex and gradual process and comprises distinct but inter-related legal, economic and socio-cultural dimensions. In order to facilitate field offices' development of local integration programmes, in 2006 UNHCR developed guidelines and tools, including



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With the microcredit loan he received, Tajik returnee Faiziddin now grows corn, potatoes, wheat and cotton in Fikodor village, Varksh district.

a set of benchmarks and indicators and a checklist to aid needs assessments.

In 2006, UNHCR created a Task Force on Local Integration in Africa. This multi-functional team brought together the regional bureaux and two support divisions (the Division of International Protection Services and the Division of Operational Support) to identify countries where local integration of refugees was possible and to agree on field support. The task force also finalized tools

prepared by the support divisions to help formulate and implement local integration strategies. Finally, the task force deployed technical support missions to Angola, Guinea, Liberia, Mozambique, Namibia and Sierra Leone.

In Latin America, integration efforts were pursued within the regional framework of the Mexico Plan of Action. This plan fostered the integration of refugees with the implementation of community activities along Latin American borders (*Borders of Solidarity* initiative), as

Repatriation and Reintegration of Nigerian Refugees

Close cooperation between UNHCR and the Governments of Cameroon and Nigeria led to the successful return of some 10,400 refugees to Nigeria. To ensure the sustainability of return, UNHCR and nine other UN agencies agreed to implement joint interventions in Nigeria's Taraba State starting in 2006. The overall purpose was to deter recurring ethnic conflict in the State by fostering peace and reconciliation and empowering returnees and the community as a whole.

By the end of 2006, the joint programme had made significant progress. It had distributed livestock to returnees and other communities; rehabilitated a power plant and a water-treatment plant in Gembu; and completed four out of five planned community centres. In addition, the programme provided four maize-grinding machines to communities of return and conducted workshops on the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence and HIV and AIDS in five communities.

The Government of Nigeria supported the reintegration programme through its specialized agencies, while UNDP pledged to join the programme in 2007. The UN joint programme will continue until December 2007. However, an expanded programme may continue beyond 2007 as Taraba State has been given high priority by the UN country team for development and HIV and AIDS interventions.

well as by focusing on access to basic services and self-reliance in urban centres hosting refugees (*Cities of Solidarity* initiative).

Global Objective 3.d: Develop comprehensive strategies for refugees in protracted situations in which multiple durable solutions are required, in particular for Somali and Afghan refugees, and establish relevant partnerships for durable solutions for the Africa Programme

Compared to the previous year, UNHCR's list of major protracted refugee situations was reduced by one in 2006, to 30. Improved conditions in Tajikistan since the end of the 1990s civil conflict resulted in the invocation of the "ceased circumstances" clause of the 1951 Convention in December 2005 for those Tajik refugees who had fled conflict. Voluntary return reduced the number of Liberian refugees in Guinea, Burundian refugees in the United Republic of Tanzania and Angolan refugees in Zambia. Elsewhere in the world, durable solutions were found for two out of five Bosnian refugees in Serbia and for seven out of ten refugees from Croatia in the Balkans.

Refugees from Afghanistan, Somalia, Bangladesh, Nepal and Thailand were some of the populations in protracted refugee situations that received particular attention in 2006. In an attempt to address the long exile of Afghan refugees, since 2003 UNHCR has been trying to widen the range of solutions offered by the Governments of the region. Progress in this regard was made at the beginning of 2006: provisions for return and reintegration, as well as the management of broader population movements, including temporary labour migration, were incorporated in the international strategy for Afghanistan, known as the Afghanistan Compact, for 2006-2010.

Ongoing research into the role of Afghan refugees in the economies of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan, as well as the potential economic role of refugee returnees to Afghanistan, revealed new insights into the functioning of regional labour markets and reintegration challenges. An analysis of key sectors, such as health, education, water and sanitation, in the districts of Pakistan where many Afghans live, was completed as part of an assessment to prepare an assistance programme for refugee-hosting communities.

In the case of Somali refugees, the preparatory phase of the Somalia Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) was completed in 2006. This phase served to identify the needs of Somali refugees in four countries of asylum (Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Yemen) and of returnees and IDPs inside Somalia. On the basis of the concerns identified, UNHCR designed a series of projects to fill protection and assistance gaps in the five countries targeted by the CPA.

In Bangladesh, a residual group of some 28,000 refugees from Myanmar continues to live in two camps in the Cox's Bazaar region. In addition, a large number of nationals from Myanmar with a similar profile and likely need for international protection live scattered in the area. In 2006, preparations were made with partners in Dhaka and Geneva for a stakeholders' meeting in 2007 to address this situation in a comprehensive manner. Meanwhile, UNHCR played a role in drawing the attention of the UN country team to the development needs in those areas inhabited by refugees. Improvements were also made in shelter, protection and livelihood conditions.

A core group of countries supported UNHCR in the development of a comprehensive durable solutions strategy for refugees in Nepal. With the offer of substantial resettlement opportunities, a new dynamic characterized the discussion on solutions for this group, unlocking a situation which had seen no changes for over a decade. In addition, a refugee census exercise, to be completed in 2007, is expected to improve UNHCR's capacity to identify refugees with special needs, find durable solutions for them and to ensure that personal documents are issued to all refugees.

In Benin, Burkina Faso, Kenya and Thailand, UNHCR also sought to link the strengthening of State protection capacities with an expansion of solutions for refugees. A key goal of these country initiatives was to improve refugee self-reliance. With technical support from ILO and UNHCR's Peacebuilding, Livelihoods and Partnership Section, comprehensive self-reliance strategies were developed. These have been tailored to improve the economic strength of refugees and provide benefits to hosting communities. They are also designed to respond to the circumstances of those refugees who are likely to return home in the foreseeable future (by equipping them with the skills needed for reintegration) and those for whom continued residence in the host States is anticipated.

A multifunctional approach to technical support: the Task Force on Local Integration in Africa

In 2006, UNHCR saw an increase in demand for technical support from field offices engaged in local integration activities worldwide, but especially in Africa. The Africa Bureau initiated a process of consultations with the Division of International Protection Services and the Division of Operational Services and established a multifunctional Task Force on Local Integration in Africa. The objective was to apply a holistic approach to local integration operations in the continent.

The task force identified priority countries where local integration was a distinct possibility, using

criteria such as repatriation prospects and local integration challenges. The team also identified another tier of African countries where local integration could be an option. Through this process, four refugee situations in Western and Central Africa were marked for priority attention.

At the same time, missions were undertaken to review the situation in these host countries and to provide technical support to the local UNHCR operations. As a result of these efforts, a series of country specific recommendations were made to improve the legal and socio-economic integration and

self-reliance of refugees who opted to remain in the host country.

The task force also followed up the recommendations on local integration made at the 2005 *Regional Experts Meeting on Sustainable Solutions to Situations of Forced Displacement in West Africa*, held in Accra, Ghana. This included the sharing of experiences with local integration in the region, as well as a comprehensive study in early 2007 on the use of the Economic Community of West African States' (ECOWAS) protocols to promote local integration.