

LIBERIA

INITIAL OBJECTIVES

- Ensure the protection of Sierra Leonean refugees, and provide them with assistance, focusing on activities to enhance their self-sufficiency.
- In close co-ordination with UNHCR in Sierra Leone, monitor the situation in Sierra Leone. If the security conditions and the reception capacity continue to improve, initiate the organised voluntary repatriation of Sierra Leonean refugees.
- Continue to support existing systems for the prevention of, and response to, sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) in refugee communities.
- Empower refugees through education and skills training to enhance their capacity to integrate and rebuild their country upon return.
- Monitor the protection and welfare of Liberian returnees and other war-affected populations; ascertain the sustainability of reintegration and rehabilitation activities, and organise the gradual hand-over of programmes to the Government, other UN agencies and/or NGOs.
- Pending the identification of the best durable solutions, ensure the protection of urban refugees, and assist them through the provision of allowances to cover their basic shelter, medical and education costs.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND CONSTRAINTS

Sierra Leonean Refugees

It was initially estimated that up to 25,000 refugees would return to Sierra Leone with UNHCR's assistance or on their own during 2001. Despite encouraging signs, including the evolution of the peace process and the deployment of UN peacekeeping troops,

present conditions do not allow UNHCR to promote repatriation to Sierra Leone. Many refugees come from areas that remain inaccessible to humanitarian workers. Spontaneous return movements of refugees from Lofa county across the border into Sierra Leone have, however, taken place. Approximately 5,000 Sierra Leonean refugees returned from Liberia during the first half of 2001.

The protection of refugee rights was promoted through the strengthening of the institutional capacity of the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission's (LRRRC) legal section. UNHCR, in collaboration with the LRRRC, conducted three workshops on international protection for the staff from the Liberian Joint Security (which includes the police, immigration, and customs departments) as well as human rights agencies. The workshops focused on international refugee law, relevant international and national conventions (i.e. Liberia's 1993 Refugee Act), human rights monitoring and paralegal training. Specific attention was given to women's and children's issues, most notable that of sexual and gender-based violence. In May, with support from UNHCR, members of the LRRRC's legal council attended an international seminar on SGBV held in Geneva.

The prevailing volatile security situation in Liberia's Lofa county remained one of the main constraints affecting UNHCR's work. UNHCR did not have access to some 45,000 Sierra Leonean refugees estimated to be living in the country. The difficult socio-economic context also hampered the development of self-reliance activities for refugees and returnees. Liberia has struggled to rebuild its economy and basic infrastructure after seven years of civil war. The international sanctions imposed on the country by the United Nations Security

Council in May 2001, because of Liberia's alleged support to the rebels of Sierra Leone through the diamonds-for-guns deal, have led to a further deterioration of the economic situation. Prices of essential commodities have risen and the Liberian dollar has been devaluated.

UNHCR continued to provide assistance to some 35,000 Sierra Leonean refugees living in five camps in Montserrado (Banjor, Samukai, VOA-1, Zuannah) and Grand Cape Mount (Sinje) counties. Through a well-established network of national and international implementing partners, the basic needs of refugees were met. In all projects the active participation of refugees was sought, and priority was given to initiatives that enhanced their self-sufficiency. In 2000, 288 hectares of agricultural land had been identified jointly by UNHCR and local authorities for cultivation by 500 refugee farmers. This year, with the approval of local authorities, refugees have started to cultivate an additional 48 hectares. Basic agricultural tools and seeds (cassava, swamp rice and vegetables) were distributed to refugees. The produce of the land has enabled them to enrich their diet.

Under the SGBV project, 99 new community groups were established where skills training and literacy courses are provided to refugee groups, in particular, to women victims of violence. Mechanisms for the reporting of incidents of violence as well as far-reaching support structures (individual and group counselling and legal representation for reported cases) were established. To increase awareness on SGBV, the community was encouraged to participate in discussions on the subject. Refugee health and hygiene education continued with an emphasis on prevention of recurrent diseases such as malaria and respiratory tract infections. Workshops and advanced training sessions for health care professionals including community health workers were carried out, addressing issues on sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS, environmental sanitation,

disease prevention, and medical treatment. Refugees were given responsibility for the construction and maintenance of sanitation facilities in the camps, and were provided with the necessary tools and materials.

A comprehensive assessment of shelters was carried out in all camps to determine the need for new plastic sheeting. The results showed that a general distribution was necessary in Sinje camp. In Montserrado camps only the most vulnerable groups will receive new plastic sheets. Distributions in Sinje camp were completed in the first part of the year while distributions in Montserrado camps are expected to commence in the last week of July. Activities aimed at preserving the environment were carried out in the form of the production and distribution of some 330 fuel-efficient ecological stoves. The transplanting of pre-germinated seedlings was also organised in all camps, and seven sessions to raise awareness on environmental issues were conducted.

Structures for food distribution were completed in all camps. This has greatly improved the efficiency of the distribution system as well as the accuracy of the monitoring. In early May 2001, a joint UNHCR/WFP annual food assessment mission to Liberia (with the participation of donors) was organised. The report of the mission showed that the food ration was insufficient and malnutrition rates were on the rise. A decision was therefore taken to increase the food ration from 1,130 kcal to 1,700 kcal per person per day, to be implemented as of January 2002. In addition, through two implementing partners, UNHCR continues to organise distributions of supplementary food for vulnerable groups as well as therapeutic feeding for malnourished children.

Due to shortfalls in funding UNHCR's programmes had to be reduced by 20 per cent and a number of activities had to be cut. Under the education sector for example, only 50 per cent of the planned vocational training courses are being organised. In the

health sector, the distribution of mosquito bed nets had to be postponed and the

activities in the agriculture sector were reduced considerably.

Progress as measured against selected indicators

INDICATORS	PROGRESS
Refugees receive appropriate legal representation.	10 refugees who were victims of aggravated assault and rape received legal representation.
Increased awareness among government officials of refugee legislation.	During a two-day workshop, 310 law enforcement officers received training on international protection and refugee law.
Refugees in all camps have better access to support under the SGBV project and all refugee groups are informed about SGBV issues.	A total of 99 community groups consisting of block management committees, local courts, men, women and youth groups were established in the five camps. Meetings to inform refugees about SGBV were organised. Some 48 meetings for men (480 participants), 44 meetings for women (1,400 participants) and 34 meetings for youth (2,700 participants) were held during the first half of the year.
Students receive higher quality education in camps.	192 refugee teachers participated in advanced teacher training courses.
The refugee community is increasingly responsible for the maintenance of sanitary and water facilities in the camps.	Some 48 water and sanitation committees were established in the camps to encourage community participation in hygiene and sanitation projects. A total of 75 refugees participated in pump caretaker sessions to enable them to maintain their own water facilities.
Environmental degradation is lessened.	A survey shows that the number of refugees using 'eco-stoves' is increasing. Less firewood is needed, which reduces forest degradation.
Refugee shelters are improved.	Over 3,900 pieces of plastic sheeting and locally available construction material were distributed for the improvement of shelters.
The overall performance of implementing partners is improved.	The following capacity-building workshops were conducted with implementing partners: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A two-day session on reporting, taking into consideration impact and performance indicators. • A one-day workshop on planning of weekly activities and stock management at the camp level.

Liberian Returnees

Since the beginning of the voluntary repatriation programme in 1997, UNHCR has assisted over 161,300 Liberians (including 2,041 from Côte d'Ivoire in the first half of 2001) to return to their country of origin. In addition, it is estimated that some 213,640 Liberians have returned on their own. In January 2001, as Liberians faced increasing protection problems in Guinea, the Government of Liberia chartered a boat to assist its citizens (approximately 450 persons) to return from Conakry. UNHCR provided support to the Government in terms of logistics, and

distribution of basic non-food items to returnees. However, because of the ongoing military activity in Lofa county, and the closure of the border between Guinea and Liberia, no large-scale organised repatriation movements or reintegration activities could be undertaken. A community-based security watch project, intended to provide safety for local residents, returnees and refugees in Lofa county, was suspended. The deterioration of the security situation in the county caused further displacement. Camps in Bong and Gbarmpolu counties had to be established, and the international and national NGOs, under the leadership of the

LRRRC are providing assistance to some 30,000 IDPs. UNHCR is closely monitoring the situation through its participation in co-ordination meetings organised by the LRRRC.

The responsibility for reintegration activities in the other main areas of return (Bong, Nimba, Grand Gedeh and Maryland counties) was handed over to local authorities and/or other humanitarian agencies. UNHCR's offices in Gbarnga, Harper and Zwedru were closed at the end of March 2001 as planned. Although returnees

no longer receive direct financial support from UNHCR, they continue to benefit from on-going projects. An important micro-finance project established in 2000 with initial funding from UNHCR, now has over 3,000 clients. Its management is to be turned over to UNOPS at the end of 2001. In addition, several health and education projects are now directly organised by former UNHCR partners. To enhance their operational capacity, UNHCR provided a limited number of partners with support through the loan or donation of vehicles, computers, and generators.

Progress measured against selected indicators

INDICATOR	PROGRESS
Reintegration projects continue to benefit returnees.	3,000 clients benefit from micro-finance projects in areas of return.
The sustainability of reintegration projects is ensured.	Reintegration projects (in health, education, micro-finance) in four of the six main counties of return were handed over to local authorities and other humanitarian organisations.
The capacity of operational partners is enhanced.	Five local and three international partners were provided with support through the loan or donation of vehicles, computers, and generators.

Urban Refugees

In the first half of the year, UNHCR provided assistance to 16 urban refugees. At the same time, the best durable solution is sought for each case. The main lasting solutions include resettlement, voluntary repatriation, and local integration.

Plans to encourage self-sufficiency of refugees were not successful. Two applications for loans were received, but were not approved, largely because of the clear lack of experience on the part of the candidates to run such businesses. UNHCR has referred the candidates to experts for advice in small-scale business management.

REVISED OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITIES FOR JULY-DECEMBER

Due to the prevailing security situation in Lofa county, the projects for the repatriation and reintegration of Liberian refugees in the area could not be established. UNHCR will continue to closely monitor the security

situation in Lofa county, while concentrating its work in the following areas:

- Promotion of the respect of refugee rights and prevention of all cases of harassment. Special measures to protect the well-being of women and children in the camps will be further supported through skills training, psychosocial counselling and social support.
- Development of training materials on alleviation of SGBV. Organisation of training workshops and a campaign against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).
- Assessment of the vulnerable groups that will focus on their nutritional status. Based on the results of the survey, the need for additional supplementary and therapeutic feeding will be reviewed.
- Development of programmes to enhance hygiene education and construction of new family latrines with emphasis on community mobilisation and participation.

- Improve education facilities in the camps and increase number of secondary school and vocational training programmes.
- If the security situation in Sierra Leone continues to improve and the absorption

capacity in the country is enhanced, initiation of a programme to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of Sierra Leonean refugees.

FINANCIAL DATA (USD)

	Initial Budget	Revised Budget	Total Funds Available¹	Total Funds Obligated
APB and TF	14,286,128	9,909,791	4,988,964	3,362,560
SPB	1,501,600	1,220,918	2,149	0
Total	15,787,728	11,130,709	4,991,112	3,362,560

¹Includes income from unrestricted contributions, income from contributions restricted to the regional, sub-regional and/or country level, opening balance and adjustments.