



COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN

OVERVIEW

Country: Ethiopia

Planning Year: 2006

2006 COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN FOR ETHIOPIA

Part I: OVERVIEW

1. Protection and socio-economic operational environment

At the end of 2004 Ethiopia was hosting a total of 115,980 refugees split in four main groups: Sudanese in the west, Somali in the east, Eritrean in the north and a small group of urban refugees comprising 17 nationalities mainly located in Addis Ababa.

In 2006, UNHCR Ethiopia plans to continue to provide them with international protection and humanitarian assistance while working for durable solutions to their situation.

Technical support and advice will be provided to the Ethiopian Government in the implementation of the Refugee Proclamation approved by the Parliament in June 2004. Although related activities already started in 2005, these will be reinforced in 2006 in such a way that by the end of the year a fully-fledged national RSD procedure will be in place, with trained staff, including interpreters, and a functioning country of origin information unit.

Regarding durable solutions, it is foreseen that, subject to absorption capacity at in "Somaliland", Aisha refugee camp in eastern Ethiopia might be closed in mid 2005. Should this happen, there will be only one camp, Kebribeyah, hosting some 12,600 Somali refugees, most of them native from southern and central Somalia. Subject to availability of funds, efforts will be pursued to promoting self-reliance of this group as per UNHCR's Manual on this matter. At the same time, in the west, the focus of the programme will move towards repatriation of Sudanese refugees. It is expected that, conditions in south Sudan permitting, some 14,000 Sudanese refugees (please refer to Theme 4 in page 21) will return to their areas of origin/selection in southern Sudan. In this respect, very close coordination with UNHCR Offices in south Sudan and in other neighboring countries hosting Sudanese refugees will be vital to ensure the successful and timely repatriation of these refugees in safety and dignity.

Eritrean asylum seekers have been arriving at an average of 200-250 persons per month in the past few years and this number is expected to rise.. Unless the situation radically changes in their country of origin this steady flow is expected to continue and that there will be almost 10,000 of them assisted by the end of 2005. The situation for Eritrean refugees seems to be the most disadvantageous due to the harsh conditions prevailing at Shimelba camp where there is very small room left for activities related to self-reliance, specially for those refugees who do not have access to remittances from their relatives abroad.

Being aware of the difficult situation facing a considerable number of Eritrean refugees who could not finish university/tertiary education due to their flight from Eritrea, the Ethiopian Government has offered these students access to the relevant institutions in the same terms and conditions Ethiopians are accepted. Once the details of this proposal are fine tuned, UNHCR Ethiopia would locally contact donor country representatives seeking for their support to financially sustain this proposal.

In 2006, UNHCR will continue to look for resettlement solutions for Eritrean and Sudanese refugees on an individual basis. In the case of the Sudanese, special emphasis will be placed on vulnerable cases and on those cases who could not return to their country of origin due to protection related reasons. The window of opportunity for group resettlement opened by one of the major resettlement countries could be seized in case the ongoing negotiations for repatriation of this caseload failed. There are no local settlement perspectives in Ethiopia.

While advocating for the protection of refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and other people of concern to the organization, UNHCR's effort to create and nurture effective partnerships in Africa will be guided by the global drive to help the continent deal with its numerous and complex political, peace and security as well as socio-economic development needs as identified in the New Economic Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) strategic vision. The problems of refugees, asylum seekers and the internally displaced cannot be conclusively resolved in isolation from the wider problems of insecurity, political instability, poverty and underdevelopment.

Strong partnerships already established with African countries, the African Union (AU), NEPAD, the Inter-governmental Authority for Development (IGAD) and other sub-regional, regional and continental organizations will be further nurtured through close collaboration at various levels including on the formulation of continental and strategic policies and frameworks, as well as the effective implementation of existing AU, UN and other international covenants, conventions and instruments. Various projects with the African Union, such as the 2006 Ministerial Meeting and the joint resource mobilisation effort, through the establishment of a Special Solidarity Fund for refugees in Africa, will constitute a further step ahead. Events with other regional institutions, such as the IGAD Conference on refugees, which may not be able to take place in 2005, will be pursued for 2006.

The exit strategy from eastern Ethiopia where the presence of refugees has significantly decreased from 628,000 at the peak of the influx to some 12,600 expected to be there at the beginning of 2006 will continue to be pursued. The results of the joint UNCT proposal submitted to JICA on the basis of the Development assistance for Refugee Affected Areas (DAR) initiative and cross border coordination with UNCT members in Somaliland as well as those made in the context of the Comprehensive Action Plan for Somalia (CPA) will start to be seen. Along the same lines, efforts planned to start in 2005 for a joint UN exit strategy from western Ethiopia will be strengthened in 2006.

2. Operational goals and potential for durable solutions

Within the framework of the constraints imposed by human and financial resources directly available to UNHCR and with the support of those resources contributed to the programme by NGO's, Government bodies, implementing partners, UN sister agencies and the refugees themselves, the following are the overall strategic goals for 2006 Ethiopia refugee programme:

- Provide international protection and basic multi-sectoral care and maintenance assistance to all refugees in Ethiopia as well as to and newly arrived asylum seekers pending the finding of durable solutions to their plight through voluntary repatriation and resettlement.
- Assist the Ethiopian Government in the establishment of the institutional structures and legal mechanisms required to appropriately implement the newly enacted Refugee Legislation thus ensuring the strengthening of a protection regime with international standards.
- Promote the repatriation of some 14,000 Sudanese refugees as well as to vigorously seek opportunities for those Eritrean and Sudanese refugees susceptible of resettlement as well as to promote refugee self-reliance in those camps where conditions are conducive to some level of self sufficiency.
- Empower refugee women in the planning, implementation, decision making and evaluation of the protection and assistance programme, with an emphasis on gender and SGBV related issues as well as to provide adequate assistance to vulnerable refugee children, women and elderly refugees with special needs.
- Strengthen refugee participation in program planning and implementation through continued sensitization and awareness raising activities including addressing negative cultural and gender issues (rape, early marriage, dowry, FGM, etc.) as well as on HIV/AIDS awareness, prevention and control.
- Rehabilitate the environment and selected infrastructure in the refugee impacted areas in order to restore to the extent possible the degraded areas, and to enhance reintegration prospects and capacities of those refugees who remain behind.
- Ensure the effective implementation of the joint work programmes between UNHCR and the African Union, NEPAD, IGAD and their respective Member States aimed at strengthening protection of refugees in Africa and the search for sustainable solutions to their situations.
- Continue to further stimulate relationships with UN system agencies, international and national NGO's with a view to creating a synergic environment aiming at reaching MDGs in the camps, including refugees in MDG Programmes as well as encourage joint initiatives vis a vis UNHCR's phase down/exit strategy from eastern and western Ethiopia.
- Although UNHCR is not formally involved on IDP related matters in Ethiopia, through its close relationship with the African Union, IGAD, NEPAD and other continental bodies and initiatives, it will contribute to the global efforts to help the continent deal with its numerous and complex political, peace and security as well as socio-economic development needs including the problems of refugees, asylum seekers and the internally displaced which cannot be conclusively resolved in isolation from the wider problems of insecurity, political instability, poverty and underdevelopment.
- Strengthen the literacy status of refugee women through the under shade and informal education activities so that they benefit from skills training opportunities in the camps. Refugee women will play a greater role in the distribution of food ration and community leadership in their respective camps.

Regarding the Somali refugees, after the closure of Aisha camp in mid 2005 (subject to the absorption capacity in areas of return in Somaliland), there will be only one Somali refugee camp at Kebribeyah. This camp will lodge some 12,600 refugees from central and southern Somalia for whom, so far, repatriation is not a wide option and resettlement has very low possibilities. In this context efforts will be made to facilitate repatriation for those who decide to return and resettlement for vulnerable cases, especially medical ones. No timeframe can be established for the closure of this camp.

The Eritrean refugee camp (Shimelba) is located in an area with very difficult environmental conditions. Availability of underground water is very limited, firewood is scarce, grazing areas are far away from the camp and land availability has become a problem now that the camp is full and the local community is refusing access to additional fields required to accommodate the steadily increasing population. Self-reliance in this camp is a challenge for all those refugees who do not have access to remittances from abroad.