

# **COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN**

**Country: Lao People's Democratic  
Republic**

**Planning Year: 2002**

## **Executive Summary**

### ***(a): Context and Beneficiary Population(s)***

UNHCR has worked in Laos for the past 25 years. Having been initially requested by the Government to work with internally displaced, UNHCR then proceeded to facilitate the return of over 29,000 Laotians, both through the pre-Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) repatriation arrangements with the Government, and subsequently under the umbrella of the CPA. The final return of 1,162 from Ban Napho in the last quarter of 1999 (with a total of 1,185 returnees for 1999) marked the end of the CPA repatriation. In negotiations with the Government for the return of this group, UNHCR committed itself to remaining for 2 years following the return of the last group to provide support to the Government and reintegration assistance to the returnees themselves. Based on this agreement, UNHCR has planned for closure at the end of 2001.

The vast majority of the returnees have now been back in Laos for many years, and UNHCR considers that they are largely reintegrated. There are continuing economic problems for some returnees, but solving these would take more time and resources than are currently available to UNHCR. The last group of returnees, however, is still in the process of building permanent houses and developing new cultivation fields. When compared to the previous returnees, a higher incidence of chronic disease, opium addiction, and disabilities, and thus a high percentage of EVIs characterize the recent returnees. Activities during 2000 and 2001 have been directed at facilitating their self-sufficiency; in the absence of NGO implementing partners to provide community development activities (as for previous large group returnees), UNHCR has instead provided various types of training for new returnees—for use in villages (agricultural), small business enterprises (beauty shops, tailoring), and employment (carpentry, electrical wiring, and driving). Although the activities envisioned to support the reintegration of the most recent group of returnees would be completed in 2001, there are certain concerns that may warrant a continuing UNHCR presence.

In early 2001, the Lao People's Revolutionary Party, conducted its Seventh Party Congress. Although there were changes, the structure of the Government remains largely unchanged.

Several outstanding events marked the previous year and continue to contribute to a declining security situation. A series of bombings that started in March 2000 continued through December, giving rise to increased security throughout the capital city. An attack by Lao rebels at the Thailand border led to tension but gradually Lao/Thai relations have normalized, resulting in the signing of an extradition treaty and continuing partnerships to increase trade and tourism. The population continues to face economic problems that began during the Asian economic crisis two years ago.

Although the country is at peace, there are areas of continuing resistance activity, affecting some returnees and local villagers. There has been some

movement out of these areas. Finally, most parts of the country are not yet self-sufficient in rice production.

With planned reintegration activities largely completed, a continuing UNHCR presence would focus on protection concerns specifically affecting returnees. These include: 1) resistance activities in some parts of the country, which have had an impact on the situation of some returnees, 2) local conflicts between returnees and local villagers, 3) other protection concerns in regard to some returnees.

The Office would also continue to implement its usual statutory responsibilities in regard to refugees.

It will also continue its initiative to secure the inclusion of returnee villages in development and other programmes of the Government, UN Agencies, NGOs, International Organizations, and donors. Although UNHCR has worked closely with all parties on possible complementary activities, there has so far not been a good fit between needs of returnees and ongoing project activities; it will continue to look for links with NGOs working in specific areas.

Similarly, UNHCR will continue working with Government counterparts on appropriate activities for capacity building and promotion of accession to various international conventions.

***(b): Selected Programme Goals and Objectives***

| <u>Beneficiary population:</u><br>The returnee population of 29,068, including a total of 1,185 <sup>1</sup> returnees from Ban Napho camp in Thailand in 1999.                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
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| <u>Main Goals:</u><br>Improve protection situation for returnees.                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Principal Objectives                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Related Outputs                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Basic protection monitoring and assistance of returnees ensured.</li> <li>▪ Improved awareness of government officials on refugee issues.</li> <li>▪ Maintain sources.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Continue general returnee monitoring, as well as identify protection issues.</li> <li>▪ Attendance of Government Officials at regional seminars dealing with human rights and refugee issues under UNHCR's sponsoring.</li> <li>▪ Seminars locally organised by UNHCR Protection Officers.</li> </ul> |

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<sup>1</sup> The last group from Ban Napho Camp was 1,162, but there were also 23 returnees earlier in 1999 from Ban Napho—hence the total of 1,185.

**Main Goals:**

Improve self-sufficiency of returnees.

| <b>Principal Objectives</b>                                                                                                                                                              | <b>Related Outputs</b>                                                                                                                                                       |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Complete ongoing activities directed at improving self-sufficiency of returnees.</li> <li>▪ Sustainable increasing household income.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Vocational training conducted.</li> <li>▪ Income generation and training conducted.</li> <li>▪ Improve household income.</li> </ul> |