

SIERRA LEONE

INITIAL OBJECTIVES

- Monitor the physical safety and living conditions of returnees in main areas of return and report any security or protection-related incidents to the Government; follow-up and intervene with the authorities if necessary;
- Provide community-based reintegration assistance in a cost-effective manner to communities receiving large numbers of returnees with a view to increasing their absorption capacity and render return more viable;
- Encourage increased involvement of local grass-roots organisations and international development agencies to speed up economic and social recovery and prepare the ground for longer-term sustainable development programmes;
- If the security situation in Sierra Leone improves, increase support for voluntary repatriation by providing reintegration packages and transport assistance;
- Offer technical advice and support (material, financial or logistical), if required, to the Government and others taking care of IDPs in main areas of return; and
- Help Liberian and other refugees in need of continued international protection to achieve long-term solutions through local integration or resettlement.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS, ACHIEVED AND CONSTRAINTS

Following the signing of the Abuja 2 Agreement between the Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in early May 2001, progress was made in the deployment of UNAMSIL to Kono and other areas; the disarmament of RUF and the pro-government militias in the Kambia and Port Loko districts; and the reopening of the border with Guinea. These developments have brought new, though

limited opportunities, for humanitarian activities in the RUF-held territory.

In addition to providing assistance to Sierra Leonean returnees and Liberian refugees as envisaged at the beginning of the year, UNHCR has facilitated the return to Conakry of 60 Guinean nationals who had been abducted.

Sierra Leonean Returnees

It was foreseen that 100,000 Sierra Leonean refugees would return in 2001, should the security situation improve. Since January, UNHCR, together with IOM, has been facilitating the transportation of refugees from Conakry to Freetown, despite unfavourable conditions for return in Sierra Leone. Between January and June 2001, some 21,000 returnees were transported by boat from Conakry to Freetown. As the situation in Guinea gradually improved, the return movements by boat fell from 2,500 persons per week to less than 200 towards the end of June. Since December 2000, the overland return from Forecariah in Guinea to the Lungi Peninsula in Sierra Leone has also decreased drastically following the closure of the border between the two countries; hence, only about 400 individuals have returned in 2001. In Kabala and Daru (enclaves of government controlled areas), some 20,000 returnees were registered. Non-food items were provided to those individuals upon arrival. In addition, over 13,000 returned as a result of armed conflict in Lofa County, Liberia.

At the outset of the return movement, UNHCR, in co-operation with the Government, established three transit centres with a total capacity of 8,500. These centres were to host those who returned by boat from Conakry, while temporary settlement sites and potential host communities were identified and established in the eastern and southern parts of the country. UNHCR has been undertaking systematic monitoring of

returnees in transit centres, temporary settlements and host communities together with governmental counterparts, implementing partners and other NGOs. Support structures, such as the child protection network and victims of violence programmes, have also been established.

Three temporary settlements in Jembe, Gerrihun and Bandajuma have been established for those who are unable to return to their places of origin. A fourth settlement, Taiama, will be operational in August. Two chiefdoms were identified as host communities for returning refugees. The Barri Chiefdom in the south of the country currently accommodates some 6,000 returnees in 21 villages, while the Lokomassama Chiefdom in the north accommodates 15,600 returnees in 31 villages. The current capacity of established settlements and identified host communities is 46,000 persons. UNHCR is aiming to expand the total capacity to reach 100,000 by the end of the year.

Assistance given in the settlements includes the distribution of non-food items and tools to individuals, in addition to the establishment of basic facilities such as water supply and medical services. In the host communities, community-based assistance, such as the rehabilitation of schools and health centres, has been provided and is expected to encourage a harmonious relationship between returnees and host populations. Once nutrition surveys indicate an acceptable level of self-sufficiency, assistance to returnees in the host communities will be reduced. Although the host communities are the preferred temporary solution over the camps as they allow for greater self-reliance, UNHCR has opted for a dual approach in order to cope with the rapid influx. The settlements are constructed with a view to laying the foundation for new communities which could eventually become self-sufficient.

The transfer of returnees from transit centres to the settlements and host communities has often proven difficult. Returnees in the

transit camps are affected by better economic opportunities and security conditions in the Freetown area making them reluctant to move. Members of the Kono ethnic group expressed fear of being resettled in predominantly Mende areas. Returnees originating from safe areas have also been unwilling to leave transit centres because of the absence of basic infrastructure in their areas of origin following ten years of civil war. Numerous efforts have been made to overcome such obstacles. UNHCR, for example, has undertaken a joint returnee sensitisation mission together with the Government and implementing partners. A plan of action has been developed to transfer all current transit centre residents within a two-month period starting on 15 August 2001.

Among the boat arrivals, some 3,200 returnees to safe areas, who were in need of assistance, were given one-time assistance of transportation and non-food items comprising a kitchen set, blanket, jerry can, mat, tarpaulin, lamp and soap. The lack of infrastructure and basic services in safe parts of the country has sometimes led these returnees to settle in the IDP camps. Reintegration activities have been rather limited, as efforts have focused on providing emergency assistance to those unable to return to their places of origin. In the Pujehun district, Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) for rehabilitation of schools and health centres, road repairs, skills training, agricultural activities and fisheries are being implemented, benefiting 1,800 families. Micro-finance schemes for 460 returnees and locals have commenced in four districts. In the Kambia district, an initial reintegration needs assessment has taken place following positive political developments there. UNHCR also covered the costs of 15 staff, vehicles and office equipment to the National Commission for Reconstruction, Resettlement and Rehabilitation.

In order to mitigate the impact of large population movements on the environment, a specialist NGO partner is implementing

projects in the areas of environmental education and awareness-raising; community tree planting and nurseries development, promotion of fuel-efficient 'eco-stove' manufacturing, and marking and protection of trees in the camps and construction sites. These activities are to be expanded during the remainder of the year.

The security situation, especially in the RUF-held areas, has been a major constraint as most returnees could not go back to their places of origin, and monitoring could only be carried out with military escorts. Other

impediments to UNHCR's activities have included delays in the identification and government approval of suitable sites in safe areas and the lack of agencies responsible for the development of mid- and long-term water sources in the returnee settlements. Since the beginning of the rainy season in May, road conditions have deteriorated, hampering relief and reintegration efforts. An overall freeze on the creation of new posts has had an impact on UNHCR's capacity to fully support and monitor the operation.

Progress as measured against selected indicators

INDICATORS	PROGRESS
Accurate information provided to refugees on the prevailing conditions in their areas of return.	Access for gathering information could not be secured in the main areas of return except in Pujehun and more recently in Kambia. Information was provided to refugees on the prevailing situation in Sierra Leone as a whole and the nature of the assistance provided by UNHCR.
100,000 refugees repatriated in conditions of safety and dignity in the year 2001.	The situation in Sierra Leone did not allow UNHCR to actively promote the return of Sierra Leonean refugees, but the situation in Guinea led UNHCR in Sierra Leone to receive and provide assistance to some 54,000 returnees who had been arriving since September 2000.
Returnees whose places of origin are still unsafe are provided with adequate assistance.	Some 38,000 returnees unable to return to their places of origin were accommodated in settlements or host communities and provided with care and maintenance assistance.

Liberian Refugees

The intensification of the conflict in Liberia's Lofa County has resulted in an influx of some 2,000 Liberian refugees into Sierra Leone since February. In response to the Government's concerns related to the growing number of Liberian refugees, and to ensure effective monitoring of the situation, UNHCR is in the process of establishing a camp for Liberian refugees in the Kenema district, with an accommodation for some 10,000 persons. Assessment missions conducted in the Kailahun district in June have confirmed the presence of several thousand refugees. UNHCR, through an implementing partner working in close co-

operation with a governmental counterpart, is going to revive the medical services in the district. Interventions in water and sanitation sectors are also planned.

In mid-June, a screening exercise, which had been initiated in late 1999 concluded that there are 7,000 Liberians of concern to UNHCR in Sierra Leone. The result of the screening will enable better targeting of assistance and protection activities. There have been some limited local integration assistance for those Liberian refugees including micro-credit and education assistance.

Progress as measured against selected indicators

INDICATORS	PROGRESS
Assistance to Liberian refugees of concern to UNHCR improved.	As a result of the ongoing screening exercise, with the exception of generally available health care, only the most vulnerable refugees were assisted.
Dependency on assistance of some of the 7,000 Liberian refugees reduced.	Due to the delay in the screening exercise, activities aimed at helping Liberian refugees in need of continued international protection through local integration or resettlement could not be initiated.

REVISED OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITY FOR JULY–DECEMBER

There will be no significant changes to the initial objectives. Although the humanitarian situation in Sierra Leone is deemed 'not yet conducive' to mass return, UNHCR will monitor the situation closely and undertake a periodic review of its voluntary repatriation strategy. Whereas the improvement of conditions in Guinea reduced the demand for the emergency return of Sierra Leonean refugees, the deteriorating security situation in some parts of Liberia may generate the need for a similar emergency return operation in the future. The main priority for the second half of 2001 will be to consolidate assistance to those who are not able to return to their places of origin and to prepare for possible new arrivals. UNHCR is

also planning to phase out its involvement in host communities once an acceptable level of self-sufficiency becomes possible after the rainy season. With the opening of new areas such as the Kambia district, UNHCR will be able to initiate community-based reintegration assistance, which will support spontaneous return movements and pave the way for organised return at a later stage. Subject to progress in the peace process, UNHCR will extend coverage of its reintegration activities to the Kono and Kailahun districts, two main areas of return.

In addition to the initial objective of assisting those Liberian refugees screened and in need of international protection, newly arrived Liberian refugees will also be assisted. It is planned that a camp will be established for them.

FINANCIAL DATA (USD)

	Initial Budget	Revised Budget	Total Funds Available ¹	Total Funds Obligated
APB	2,183,918	2,840,402	975,445	873,800
SPB	14,013,739	15,269,421	11,653,030	10,500,000
Total	16,197,657	18,109,823	12,628,475	11,373,800

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