

REPATRIATION & REINTEGRATION OPERATIONS IN LIBERIA

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MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

11 August 2004 marked the first anniversary of the transfer of power from President Charles Taylor and his subsequent exile to Nigeria. One year after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Accra, Ghana, by warring factions and political stakeholders, the country is gradually moving away from its previous state of despair.

UNMIL is moving progressively to cover the entire country. The disarmament process is going on in all the areas and is scheduled for completion in October 2004. UNMIL Civilian Police and the Liberia National Police have been working together to reinstate rule of law.

- **Security assessment**

On 15 September, the National

Security Assessment Committee for Resettlement (SACR) declared the counties of Bomi, Grand Cape Mount, Gporpolu and Margibi safe for the return of Refugees and IDPs. The SACR reviews and analyzes the security situation with emphasis on humanitarian and protection issues. Key benchmarks for safe return include completion of disarmament and the presence of civil authorities, reasonable spontaneous returns by IDPs and refugees, ongoing rehabilitation of basic services and unhindered access by humanitarian workers. Similar assessments are being conducted in other counties.

- **Tripartite agreements**

The National Transitional Government of Liberia and

continued on page 2

AT A GLANCE

- Security improvements are prompting returns of displaced persons to their places of origin.
- UNHCR will begin facilitating the voluntary repatriation of Liberian refugees on 1 October 2004.
- USD 13.6 million are needed to support the repatriation and reintegration operation which is currently 42% funded.

IN THIS ISSUE

- Financial requirements (p.2)
- Reintegration (p.2)
- Profile of Liberian refugees (p.3)
- Multi-year operations plan (p.4)
- Planning figures (p.5)
- Community empowerment (p.6)
- Refugee perspectives (p.7)
- Mass information (p.7)
- Multi-year workplan (p.8)

FUNDING

	USD
BUDGET	39,241,983
CONTRIBUTIONS	
Canada	602,142
Denmark	1,153,213
Finland	497,512
Germany	612,745
Ireland	612,745
Netherlands	556,000
Norway	708,215
Spain	131,448
Sweden	686,813
USA	11,000,000
Private donors	48,058
TOTAL	16,608,892
Current shortfall	(22,633,091)



Returnees at the Perry Town way station. (Photo: UNHCR/S.Brownell)

FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS

During the last quarter of 2004, USD 13.6 million are needed to support the return and reintegration of Liberian refugees. UNHCR has entered into contractual agreements with more than twenty implementing partners to provide assistance and services. These range from registration activities to managing vehicle fleets and transit facilities to distribution of non-food items to construction and rehabilitation of basic infrastructure to providing services in the sectors of education and health.

As of 31 July, expenditure against the programme stood at USD 13.9 million. These funds enabled the Office to mobilise staff, equipment and relief items, and reestablish its field presence in anticipation of the large-scale return of Liberians (see also *Preparatory Activities*, p.6). UNHCR has thus strengthened its presence in Monrovia set up offices in six locations in the field in order to ensure adequate coverage of all 15 counties. Currently there are 31 international staff and 78 national staff employed in Liberia. All offices have been outfitted with vehicles, office equipment and supplies. In the interests of staff security and safety, communications equipment installed in accordance with UN Minimum Operational Safety Standards (MOSS). Transit centres and way stations have been constructed in 15 locations in the main areas of return and relief items procured and pre-positioned in readiness for the organized repatriation.

Funds were also used to meet the needs of spontaneous returnees who ended up in IDP camps in the Monrovia area as they could not return to their places of origin. UNHCR set up a trucking operation to move these returnees from the border with Sierra Leone and expanded the IDP camps to accommodate them. In the camp setting, returnees received protection and assistance in the form of shelter, domestic items, health/water/sanitation services and emergency schooling for children. UNHCR has also been providing material assistance to Liberian IDPs within the context of a collaborative inter-agency framework. It played an active role in steering the response to the protection and humanitarian needs of IDPs, including transferring IDPs from public places (schools, clinics, stadiums). In IDP camps, UNHCR distributed shelter materials and domestic items, and though its partners helped to rehabilitate/construct infrastructure in the sectors of water, health and sanitation.



Liberian returnee children watch food distribution at way station (Photo: UNHCR/S.Brownell)

Major developments (continued)

UNHCR are set to sign tripartite agreements with refugee hosting countries of Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. The agreements provide the legal framework for the repatriation of Liberian refugees and spell out the rights and obligations of the parties.

- **Spontaneous Returnees**

Since the launch of Liberia's disarmament process, Liberian refugees continue to return

home on their own initiative from mainly neighboring Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea and Sierra Leone. Most have returned from border areas in these countries, many of them moving back and forth. High numbers of refugees have returned to Lofa County, Grand Cape Mount, Montserrado, Bong, Nimba, Grand Gedeh and Maryland.

- **IDP returns**

As confidence in the peace process builds up, Liberia's internally displaced persons are

returning to their communities. Some have initiated "go and see visits" to their places of origin; others have chosen to leave the camps and return home. The recent disarmament of MODEL troops and their subsequent removal to cantonment centres in Grand Gedeh, saw the number of IDPs living alongside Ivorian refugees in Saclepea camp reduce from 1,431 to 794. IDP returns in Lofa, Bong, Grand Cape, Bomi and Gporpolu are being attributed to disarmament of ex-combatants.

PROFILE OF LIBERIAN REFUGEES

The majority of Liberian refugees in West Africa are in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Ghana. Lesser numbers reside in the Gambia, Mali, Nigeria and Senegal. They have lived in countries of asylum for periods ranging between one and twenty years.

Liberian refugees originate from all 15 counties. Lofa County will receive the highest number of returnees; currently they reside mostly in Guinea and Sierra Leone. Most of the refugees in Côte d'Ivoire originate from Maryland, while those in Ghana are mostly from Montserrado County.

Only 4% of the refugees live in urban areas. Some 59% are assisted by UNHCR mostly in camps. Females constitute 53% of the refugee population. 52% are children under 18 years of

age; many were born in exile. 5% of the refugees are elderly (more than 60 years of age).

Approximately 12% of the assisted refugee population is considered vulnerable. Most of them are single parents, single females, chronically ill or separated children and/or unaccompanied minors. There are also significant numbers of physically disabled persons, unaccompanied elders, deaf/mute persons, and visually impaired individuals.

The majority of Liberian refugees are of rural background. They are proficient crop producers (particularly of cassava, maize and rice). Over 53% of the refugees are farmers while 23% are traders. In addition there are carpenters, teachers, doctors, nurses, mechanics and masons among

the refugees registered in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea and Sierra Leone.

Out of an estimated 60,000 children aged 5 to 18 in Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and the Gambia, some 70% are enrolled or have completed primary schooling. Secondary and high school enrolments are minimal (6% and 1% respectively). The illiteracy rate is particularly high in Côte d'Ivoire estimated at 48%. This could be explained by language differences coupled with the fluid situation that has prevailed in the *Zone d'Accueil des Réfugiés* in the Côte d'Ivoire-Liberia border zones since late 2002. In Ghana most Liberian refugees have received primary, secondary and high school education; only 13% of Liberians living in Ghana have no formal education.

Statistics of refugees and IDPs per County of Origin

County of origin	IDPS (estimates)	%	Registered Refugees	%	TOTAL	%
Bomi	122,000	26%	1,341	1%	123,341	17%
Bong	61,000	13%	17,085	7%	78,085	11%
Gbarpolu	41,000	9%	2,065	1%	43,065	6%
Grand Bassa	22,000	5%	2,136	1%	24,136	3%
Grand Cape Mount	45,000	10%	13,200	5%	58,200	8%
Grand Gedeh	18,000	4%	28,539	11%	46,539	6%
Grand Kru	4,000	1%	2,041	1%	6,041	1%
Lofa	90,000	19%	84,532	33%	174,532	24%
Margibi	7,000	2%	1,856	1%	8,856	1%
Maryland	5,000	1%	42,412	17%	47,412	7%
Montserrado	8,000	2%	17,085	7%	25,085	3%
Nimba	9,000	2%	31,483	12%	40,483	6%
River Cess	23,000	5%	1,159	0%	24,159	3%
River Gee	-	0%	1,110	0%	1,110	0%
Sinoe	9,000	2%	1,551	1%	10,551	1%
Not known	-	0%	5,777	2%	5,777	1%
TOTAL	464,000	100%	253,372	100%	717,373	100%

Source: REFUGEES, RETURNEES and IDPs: 4Rs as Part of Transition, United Nations/World Bank Liberia Joint Needs Assessment, Sector Working Paper, February 2004

MULTI-YEAR OPERATIONS PLAN (2004-2007)

UNHCR has completed its Multi-Year Operations Plan for Return and Reintegration of Liberian Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (2004-2007) which will serve as the framework for coordination and implementation of the programme. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed in Accra, Ghana by the Liberian Government, rebel groups, political parties and civil society leaders in August 2003 explicitly foresees the voluntary return of refugees and IDPs in safety and dignity and is the basis on which UNHCR has planned its repatriation and reintegration programme. The return movement is expected to peak in the run-up to elections which are scheduled to take place in late 2005

The Multi-Year Operations

Plan envisages the commencement of organized repatriation activities from 1 October 2004 in two distinct phases:

- Under the **facilitation phase**, UNHCR will protection and assistance to refugees who opt to return home. This includes providing transport to areas that are deemed safe and facilitating the refugees' reintegration in their communities of origin.

UNHCR will promote voluntary repatriation after a careful assessment of the situation in the country of origin shows that stability is durable and overall improvements permit return in "safety and dignity". The **promotion phase** is therefore scheduled to take place after general elections are held in the second half of 2005. It is anticipated that by then Liberia

will have progressed towards greater political and social stability and that state authority will have been restored throughout the country.

The programme is guided by an overall strategy of facilitating the voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration of Liberian refugees and IDPs in areas that are deemed safe for return. The 4Rs programming concept will be applied to promote community development and ensure linkages between the four processes of **repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction** in post-conflict situations.

The Multi-year Operations Plan is available on UNHCR's website at www.unhcr.org under **SPECIAL EVENTS**.

STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES

- Create conditions for the **orderly movement of Liberian refugees** who opt to return to their places of origin, with special attention being paid *inter alia* to legal protection, screening, registration, information about conditions in the areas of return and convoy operations.
- Under the leadership of the Humanitarian Coordinator and within the context of the inter-agency collaborative approach, contribute to the provision of **protection and assistance to IDPs** along with other agencies.
- Initiate **community-based reintegration** activities in the main areas of return to help build absorptive capacity in order to ensure that returnees have access to basic services.
- Ensure that **refugee and returnee protection issues** are taken into account in the reconciliation process. In particular, UNHCR and partners must contribute to making the electoral process as inclusive as possible by facilitating the return of refugees in order that they may exercise their right to vote.
- Conduct **monitoring** activities to ensure that returnees are properly integrated into society and that their civil rights are respected. Support Government efforts to help returnees recover their property and gain access to land.
- Establish linkages with other actors, particularly those who will be involved in **medium to long-term reconstruction and recovery programmes**.

PREPARATORY ACTIVITIES

- UNHCR has established Offices in Gbarnga, Harper, Saclepea, Tubmanburg, Voinjama and Zwedru. There are 31 field-based international staff and 78 national staff in Liberia.
- Vehicles and communication equipment have been procured. Similarly relief items have been purchased and pre-positioned for distribution including domestic items, soap, sanitary supplies for women, condoms, agricultural tools, plastic sheets. Those from rural areas will receive agricultural tools. Shelter kits will also be distributed. WFP will provide a four-months food ration per person.
- Agreements have been entered into with more than 20 implementing partners to provide assistance and services to returnees in a range of sectors.
- Mass information activities have begun in countries of asylum, to help refugees make free and informed decisions about return.
- Registration for voluntary repatriation has commenced in countries of asylum.
- The majority of refugees living in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Sierra Leone are to be repatriated by road. Sea transportation will be used mainly for refugees in Ghana and other regional sea port cities. Transportation by air will be provided for specific groups of refugees from distant countries of asylum and for vulnerable individuals.
- Transit centres, way stations and drop off points have been established across Liberia. Way stations will be used for brief stops during the journey to enable returnees to refresh and have meals. Transit centres will be used for overnight stays; returnees will receive water, cooked meals and health care if needed. Where UNHCR is not able to transport returnees to their communities of origin, they will be taken to drop off points and provided with cash for the final journey.

REPATRIATION PLANNING FIGURES

Country of asylum	Pop. Dec 2003	2004		2005		2006	
		Spontaneous	Organised	Spontaneous	Organised	Spontaneous	Organised
Guinea	149,000	36,500	10,000	10,000	60,000	5,000	20,000
Sierra Leone	67,200	13,000	10,000	4,000	20,000	2,000	12,000
Côte d'Ivoire	74,200	20,000	5,000	20,000	16,000	2,000	8,000
Ghana	42,400	300	2,700	1,000	19,000	1,000	14,000
Nigeria	6,000	300	1,000		35,000		1,000
Gambia	750				300		200
Others	1,150		300		200		200
TOTAL	341,300	70,100	28,700	35,000	119,000	10,000	55,400

REINTEGRATION

- **Capacity building**

UNHCR collaborated with LRRRC to conduct a training workshop for 35 community empowerment project workers in Lofa County. They were subsequently deployed in Voinjama, Zorzor, Salayea and Kolahun Districts to help residents of the areas identify their development needs within the context of the UNHCR Community Empowerment Projects.

- **Agriculture**

Within the 4Rs framework, UNHCR and FAO have signed an agreement aimed at revitalizing agriculture in returnees areas. The project will concentrate in the counties of Bomi, Grand Cape Mount, Lofa and Maryland. Major activities include the distribution of seed and tools, agricultural extension services and support to local district agriculture line ministries.

- **District Development Committees**

UNHCR and UNDP are to sign a multi year MOU which will include collaboration in the formation of District Development Committees (DDCs) and implementation of Community Empowerment

Projects. The project will involve joint assessment and evaluation missions, integrated planning, joint approval of community projects. In this connection, UNHCR and UNDP participated in a joint mission to Nimba and Grand Gedeh Counties as part of efforts to help organize DDCs. They held meetings with local authorities in both counties. When constituted, DDCs will identify priority project areas for funding by UNHCR and UNDP.

- **Gender mainstreaming**

Gender development project funded by UNHCR and UNIFEM has conducted assessment and training sessions in Bong and Lofa counties on activities aimed at gender equality, prevention of SGBV and community care for the returning refugees and IDPs. This project is implemented in close collaboration with Gender Ministry at county level.

- **Environment**

In August a workshop on mainstreaming environment for UNHCR partners was facilitated by implementing partner Environmental Foundation For Africa. EFA is carrying out environmental programmes in communities of return targeting community leadership and schools. The project also aims at supporting line ministries at county level to realize environmental objectives.

COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT PROJECTS (CEPs)

More than 30 CEPs are being implemented in the counties of Bong, Grand Gedeh, Nimba and Montserrado. These start up programmes comprise mainly rehabilitation of community schools, shelter projects, water and sanitation facilities, strengthening women groups and youth programmes. In addition, more than 200 CEP proposals have been received from communities in all counties.

In accordance with the CEP Guidelines—which were developed jointly with UNDP—proposals are submitted by the communities through the district development committees. CEPs must be endorsed by relevant line ministries to ensure conformity with agreed standards and county development plans.

Communities prioritize identify and projects and undertake to play the lead role in their

implementation. They elect a project management committee (PMC) which is charged with the day to day management of the project. PMCs have to be inclusive with representation from the women and youth. CEP proposals will not be approved if this criteria is not met. Training has been conducted for communities in Grand Gedeh , Bong, Grand Cape Mount, Bomi, Montserrado and Lofa counties.

A REFUGEE'S PERSPECTIVE ON REPATRIATION

During the launch of the mass information campaign in the camps in N'zerekore, Guinea on 1st August, one could see how excited the refugees were at the prospect of returning to their country after being forced into exile for more than a decade. "There is no place like home" declared 41 year-old Mohamed M. Dulleh, Chairperson of the Kouankan Refugee Committee.

Mohamed originates from Bakedou in Lofa County. He has three wives and four children. He came to Guinea in 1999. He is well educated, knows what he wants and plans to positively contribute in the reconstruction of his homeland. "All I wish is to find upon return, are facilities to help our families have adequate treatment as it is presently the case in camps. We need education, health and sanitary facilities".

Many refugees want to return to their villages, but fear for their security. Some of them already experienced atrocities in 2000, when they returned from Guinea to take part in presidential elections in their country. During the mass information campaigns, refugees continuously ask questions on how they can get their occupied property back, and how long they will stay in transit centres in Liberia. "We do not wish to leave camps and return for long in other camps in our own



Registration of Liberian refugees in N'zerekore camps in Guinea. (Photo: UNHCR)

country". Refugees also wonder whether every member of a family can have the right to bring the 50 kgs personal luggage mentioned in the mass information bulletin.

However, for some refugees, it is not yet time to go back home, since peace and security are not totally restored. Those refugees allege that inter-ethnic conflicts may still result in vengeance. So, the international community should better promote peace education to allow good cohabitation between families and ethnic groups.

MASS INFORMATION

Mass information activities are taking place in countries of asylum to enable help refugees make informed decisions on whether to return to Liberia. In Sierra Leone, Regular programmes are broadcast by three radio stations in Sierra Leone (Bo, Kailahun, Kenema) and Guinea (Kissidougou, Nzerekore). The possibility of using community radio stations in Cote d'Ivoire (Guiglo, Tabou) to transmit UNHCR messages to Liberian refugees is being explored. In Nigeria and Ghana, UNHCR announcements are posted on bulletin boards or distributed to refugee leaders in the Liberian refugee



communities.

The centerpiece of UNHCR's mass information campaign for Liberian refugees is a bimonthly report, *The Liberia Bulletin*. It will be translated in several local languages. Meanwhile,

UNHCR has contracted the services of Talking Drum Studio (TDS), which specializes in

advocacy work, mainly conflict resolution. TDS will produce soap operas, magazine-type pieces and interviews that will illustrate UNHCR activities in Liberia. The products will be distributed to local FM radio stations in the countries of asylum. TDS provided the same services for UNHCR's repatriation programme for Sierra Leonean refugees .

UNMIL radio station has offered UNHCR a 15-minute weekly programme. Its reach is currently limited to Monrovia, Gbarnga and Zwedru. As UNMIL troops deploy across the country. Its broadcasts will be heard in neighboring countries in the future. UNHCR will also produce video films about conditions in Liberia.

UNHCR Regional Multi-Year Operations Plan for the Repatriation & Reintegration of Liberian Refugees and IDPS
WORKPLAN

Milestones:	2004			2005			2006			2007														
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Planning figures:																								
Spontaneous return	70,100												10,000											
Organised repatriation	28,700												55,400											
TOTAL	98,800												65,400											
Complete the UNMIL troop deployments	■	■	■																					
Complete UNHCR staff deployment																								
Identification of implementing partners																								
Profiling of IDPs																								
Profiling of spontaneous returnees																								
Inter-agency 4Ps workshop	◆																							
Regional meeting of UNHCR Representatives	▲																							
Regional repatriation review meetings																								
Crossborder repatriation meetings																								
Rehabilitation/construction of transit centres																								
Preparation of regional logistics plan																								
Preparation of mass information plan																								
Signing of Tripartite Agreements																								
Start mass information campaigns																								
Start mass registration of returnees																								
Organised voluntary repatriation (facilitated)																								
Start distribution of returnee packages																								
Community Empowerment Project workshop																								
Start reintegration projects including CEPs																								
HCR Country Operations planning exercise																								
General elections																								
Installation of elected government																								
Organised voluntary repatriation (promoted)																								
Phase out of repatriation operation																								

◆ UN-specific ▲ UNHCR-specific ● Liberia state-specific