

POLICY FRAMEWORK AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

UNHCR'S ROLE IN SUPPORT OF THE RETURN AND REINTEGRATION OF DISPLACED POPULATIONS

Summary

This policy framework and implementation strategy presents UNHCR's approach to the challenge of promoting reintegration, especially in war-torn and transitional societies. The paper begins by defining the concept of reintegration and identifies both the problems and opportunities associated with UNHCR's involvement in this challenge. After explaining the added value which the Office brings to post-conflict situations, the paper sets out the principles and practices that will characterize its reintegration programmes and identifies the steps that will be taken to operationalize this approach. The paper concludes with a presentation of UNHCR's approach to the task of disengaging from reintegration scenarios.

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Introduction

1. New opportunities have arisen to promote the reintegration of people who have been displaced and forced into exile by armed conflict and human rights violations. This paper explains the nature of those opportunities and presents the strategy that UNHCR will use to capitalize upon them.

Part I - The context

2. Over the past decade, up to 15 million refugees and countless numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) have returned to parts of their own country where armed conflicts have come to an end or diminished significantly in intensity¹. The impact of devastation and neglect on such areas is usually so great that returnees find it very difficult to establish new livelihoods, access basic services and benefit from the rule of law.

3. In such contexts, the absence of well-synchronized relief, recovery and development initiatives may obstruct the peacebuilding process and increase the potential for new forms of social and political turmoil. There is a strong imperative to avert such scenarios, as the sustainable return and reintegration of displaced populations brings lasting benefits to all of the stakeholders concerned: countries of origin, donor States and, most important of all, returnees and their communities.

4. Supporting the sustainability of return and reintegration is an integral part of UNHCR's responsibility for the promotion of durable solutions. Traditionally, the Office has exercised that responsibility most directly in relation to refugees. Now that UNHCR has assumed an enhanced role in the inter-agency response to the challenges of internal displacement, the Office is equally committed to the task of finding durable solutions for IDPs.

Part II - Understanding reintegration

5. Experience has shown that return and reintegration is not a simple reversal of displacement, but a dynamic process involving individuals, households and communities that have changed as a result of their experience of being displaced. Children may have been born and raised in exile, for example. Women are likely to have taken on new roles as head of families and breadwinners.

6. Reintegration does not consist of "anchoring" or "re-rooting" returnees in either their places of origin or their previous social and economic roles. For example, refugees and IDPs who have experienced urban or semi-urban lifestyles during their period of displacement may well move to towns and cities upon their return. Such forms of mobility should only be regarded as a failure of the reintegration process if returnees are unable to establish new livelihoods or benefit from the rule of law in their areas of origin, and thus feel that they have no choice but to settle in alternative locations.

¹ For purposes of this policy framework, the term "returnee" is used in relation to both former refugees and IDPs. It is acknowledged, however, that the notion of durable solutions as understood in the refugee context (voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement) cannot simply be transposed and applied in the context of internally displaced persons. The range of solutions for IDPs is different (voluntary return, local integration, settlement elsewhere) and there is no hierarchy among them, since they flow from the right to freedom of movement and the right to choose one's residence. This policy does not address the specific policy considerations relating to settlement elsewhere and the local integration of refugees or IDPs.

7. On the basis of these considerations, this paper regards reintegration as a process which involves the progressive establishment of conditions which enable returnees and their communities to exercise their social, economic, civil, political and cultural rights, and on that basis to enjoy peaceful, productive and dignified lives.

8. The notion of reintegration also entails the erosion (and ultimately the disappearance) of any differentials that set returnees apart from other members of their community, in terms of both their legal and socio-economic status. More broadly, reintegration is an important component of the reconciliation and peacebuilding process, and is thus closely linked to the progressive reduction of political and social violence, as well as the establishment of effective and equitable judicial procedures and of the rule of law.

9. There are many obstacles that stand in the way of a smooth reintegration process. Returnees often go back to remote and isolated areas that are affected by chronic poverty and instability, and which may not feature very prominently (if at all) in national and international recovery and development plans and programmes. In such circumstances, the reintegration process may be slow and suffer from periodic set-backs, especially when refugees and IDPs go home in large numbers and in a short space of time, and are obliged to compete for scarce resources and public services.

10. In these circumstances, it is essential for national and international actors to coordinate their activities and to ensure that the reintegration process is addressed in a coherent and comprehensive manner. Isolated interventions in a single or limited number of sectors will not have the desired impact and outcome.

11. UNHCR considers it essential to recall that as a result of their initiative, enterprise and resilience, returnees and their communities often succeed in re-establishing their lives and livelihoods, even in the most adverse conditions. UNHCR's reintegration activities cannot bring about fundamental changes to those conditions, the roots of which are usually to be found in longstanding political, social and economic processes. The interventions undertaken by the Office can, however, tip the balance in favour of the people most directly concerned by the process of return and reintegration, providing them with an opportunity to enjoy a more peaceful and productive life than they have experienced in the past.

Part III - Earlier approaches

12. UNHCR's involvement in reintegration processes took shape in the early 1990s, a period which witnessed large-scale refugee and IDP returns to and within countries characterized by ongoing or lingering conflict, devastated economies and infrastructure, and a legacy of violence and distrust. During this period, opportunities for local integration and refugee resettlement diminished, highlighting the role of voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration as the preferred and most feasible durable solution for refugees.

13. The Office responded to this situation by developing innovative methods to support refugees who were re-establishing themselves in their own communities, alongside IDPs and members of the community who had not been displaced. These methods included the use of Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) to foster community cohesion and ensure the provision of basic infrastructure and services, such as water, shelter, roads and livelihoods support.

A. *The hand-over concept*

14. For the next 15 years, in operations throughout the world, UNHCR and its partners implemented a range of programmes aimed at providing returnees and their communities with the means to re-establish themselves. Protection gaps and priorities were identified through returnee monitoring systems, while co-existence projects, based on inter-communal project design and implementation, were introduced to foster social reconciliation. In addition, legal assistance and capacity-building programmes were introduced to facilitate the recovery of land and property and to ensure non-discriminatory access to services.

15. During much of this period it was the prevailing sentiment that UNHCR could hand over its reintegration activities to development partners who, in consultation with national authorities, would include returnees in national development efforts. Experience has cast doubt on the feasibility of this approach. Despite some notable success stories – particularly where return occurred in the context of a comprehensive framework for solutions – other reintegration programmes proved to be more limited in their impact and sustainability, often because they were planned and implemented in isolation from national development processes and priorities.

B. *The mainstreaming approach*

16. To address these shortcomings, the Office and its partners embarked on a series of initiatives aimed at securing more effectively the mainstreaming of reintegration activities within nationally-led development processes. These initiatives included, for example, the Brookings Process, initiated in cooperation with the World Bank, which sought to overcome shortcomings that had affected earlier recovery and reintegration efforts.

17. While making some headway in this respect, the Brookings Process did not have the desired impact owing to two interrelated gaps. The first was an institutional gap resulting from differences in priorities, planning and programming cycles between humanitarian and development partners. The second was a funding gap, whereby initiatives falling between short-term relief and development assistance were chronically under-funded owing, quite simply, to uneven donor interest or lack of dedicated budget lines for reintegration activities.

18. As part of the “Framework for Durable Solutions” developed in 2003, UNHCR launched the “4Rs” approach (Repatriation, Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction), with the cooperation of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank. UNHCR’s experience with the “4Rs” has been mixed. Reviews of this approach have highlighted the difficulties for the parties concerned to set priorities in highly challenging field environments, as well as the constraints embedded in the United Nations system itself, including different understandings of the concept of transition.

C. *Lessons learned*

19. The initiatives summarized above provided a valuable framework and some useful tools for expanded partnerships between UNHCR and key development agencies, such as the World Bank and UNDP. But they were hindered by a number of factors, including weak national capacity in the early stages of transition, the sequential phasing of humanitarian and development activities, and uneven donor interest. Some Executive Committee (ExCom) members suggested that UNHCR was venturing too far into development activities, while others considered that it was doing too little to sustain reintegration.

20. Earlier reintegration experiences were also characterized by a number of partnership problems. Some initiatives galvanized considerable high-level commitment but lacked sufficient support from staff on the ground. In other instances, field-based inter-agency initiatives were obstructed by the absence of commitment at the Headquarters level. Differing organizational cultures and planning cycles acted as a further constraint to effective partnership.

21. A number of important lessons were learned from these experiences. The first was the need for development actors, including national and local authorities, to be involved the process of assessment, planning and priority setting from the earliest stage of a reintegration programme. The second was the fallacy of making a rigid distinction between short-term humanitarian relief and longer-term development initiatives. The third was the importance of adopting a community and area-based approach to reintegration that made no distinction between returning refugees, former IDPs and members of the resident population.

Part IV - Emerging partnership opportunities

22. UNHCR's role in the reintegration process is, of course, shaped by the institutional framework in which the Office is situated. This policy statement is based on a recognition that recent developments aimed at enhancing United Nations system-wide coherence and consolidating support to peacebuilding processes, provide important opportunities for enhanced partnerships and the early engagement of key actors in the reintegration process. The following initiatives are of particular importance.

23. The "*Humanitarian reform process*", launched in 2005, incorporates a new framework for collaboration and accountability in humanitarian crises, including strengthened responsibility for the internally displaced. Within this framework, the Cluster² Working Group on Early Recovery, which UNHCR believes warrants remaining as a cluster on its own, has the potential to provide opportunities for enhanced coordination and partnerships relating to reintegration. UNHCR's lead role in providing protection and emergency shelter can also be used to shape innovative approaches in order to underpin the sustainable reintegration of IDPs.

24. A new component of United Nations reform, the "*Delivering as One*" initiative, provides the opportunity for early strategic engagement with United Nations development actors and mainstreaming of displacement-related concerns into common needs assessment and programming frameworks. This initiative could become a vehicle to include returnees and returnee areas in country-level strategic documents and processes such as United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and other joint programming exercises. Similarly, tools developed by the United Nations System in collaboration with the World Bank, such as the Post-Conflict Needs Assessment (PCNA), can ensure that reintegration concerns are included in system-wide efforts.

² Recognizing that no single UN agency had the mandate and resources to protect and assist internally displaced persons globally alone, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) developed a "collaborative approach" which called for agencies to pool resources and response capacity. In 2005, a Humanitarian Response Review commissioned by the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator found that critical gaps in humanitarian response remained. To ensure a more predictable and efficient response, the IASC Principals endorsed the "Cluster Approach" in December 2005. Under this arrangement, UNHCR would assume managerial responsibility and accountability for three of nine "clusters", namely protection, emergency shelter, and camp coordination and management.

25. The establishment of "*integrated United Nations missions*" in countries such as Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Timor-Leste has provided new opportunities for substantive engagement both on security issues (e.g. mine action and the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of former combatants and their dependants), rule of law, and human rights, as well as in broader inter-agency planning and programming. Large-scale spontaneous return may take place whilst the post-conflict transformation process is still under way and the State has yet to establish its legitimacy and authority. In some cases, the security of returning refugees and IDPs may, in practice, be guaranteed by peacekeeping forces or other external military actors. Integrated missions provide an important opportunity for coordination with such actors.

26. The establishment by the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council of a Peacebuilding Commission (together with a Peacebuilding Office and Peacebuilding Fund), provides an important opportunity to marshal resources and formulate integrated strategies for post-conflict recovery in war-torn societies. Of particular significance is the Commission's focus on integrated peacebuilding strategies which move away from a sequenced approach and seek to engage multiple sectors and actors in a simultaneous manner.

27. The African Union's "*Policy Framework on Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development*" provides a continent-wide framework for the formulation of more effective reintegration initiatives.

28. New funding modalities, such as the Human Security Trust Fund, the transition budget lines of certain donor States and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), pooled funding, and multi-donor trust funds, provide potential sources of funding for reintegration activities. The World Bank's new policy on "Rapid Response to Crises and Emergencies," which aims to expedite emergency project reformulation approval to between four and ten weeks, is also of relevance in this context. The simplification of decision-making processes and streamlined financial management, procurement and disbursement procedures should allow for the quicker formulation and implementation of World Bank-supported projects in post-conflict situations.

29. UNHCR will examine each of these new opportunities and seek to capitalize upon them by establishing early and strategic cooperation with key partners. While the operational activities of the Office will continue to focus on the process of return and initial reintegration, UNHCR's programmes will be designed in the context of mid- and longer-term development frameworks established by other actors.

Part V - UNHCR's added value

30. UNHCR considers that its work in the area of return and reintegration can make an important contribution to the task of peacebuilding in post-conflict situations. However, UNHCR does not consider itself to be a development agency nor does it have the mandate or resources to sustain indefinitely its involvement in return and reintegration. Moreover, the Office recognizes that the establishment of conditions conducive to voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return is fundamentally linked to political and development processes which are outside UNHCR's mandate and capacity.

31. While some of the reintegration-related activities undertaken by UNHCR may be construed as having a developmental dimension (such as the construction of roads, schools, health centres, or potable water systems), such activities are in fact fundamental to the process of return. Without them, many refugees and IDPs would not be able to go back to their own communities.

32. UNHCR believes that through timely, targeted, time-limited, predictable and clearly defined support to the reintegration process, the Office has a crucial role to play in ensuring the sustainability of return. UNHCR can draw upon its extensive field presence, its close links with and knowledge of refugee and IDP communities, its close working relations with governmental and non-governmental partners, its understanding of the history and dynamics of displacement in a given context, its expertise in key sectors such as protection and shelter, and its presence in refugee and IDP camps as those communities prepare to return. A particular strength of UNHCR is to be found in its ability to adopt a regional approach to the challenge of return and reintegration, incorporating activities in the country of origin, as well as in the country or countries of asylum.

33. In the context of refugee situations, UNHCR can strengthen the peacebuilding process in countries of origin by promoting solutions other than voluntary repatriation. Refugees who are resettled, who integrate locally in their country of asylum or who are able to access regular migration opportunities may be in a position to support the development of their homeland by means of remittances, the transfer of skills and technologies, as well as the establishment of new trading and investment networks. Refugee and diaspora communities may also be able to use their experience of living in peaceful and pluralist societies to strengthen the reconciliation and democratization process in their countries of origin.

Part VI - Reintegration principles and practices

34. UNHCR's reintegration policy will be based on the key principles and practices that are presented below.

A. National responsibility and ownership

35. UNHCR's reintegration policy is based on the principle that returnees, whether former refugees or IDPs, are citizens of the State in which they live, and that the national and local authorities of that State have primary responsibility for their welfare. However, State capacity is often seriously limited in countries which have new or transitional authorities, and where local government structures are absent or weak. In this context, establishing an open dialogue and effective partnership with those authorities and engaging in capacity-building initiatives with them is crucial to achieving longer-term sustainability.

36. At the same time, UNHCR recognizes the important role that other national and local actors, including NGOs, community-based organizations and the institutions of civil society, can play in the reintegration process. The Office will endeavour to ensure that the capacities of these stakeholders are recognized, reinforced and mobilized in support of the reintegration process.

B. Rights, justice and reconciliation

37. The return and reintegration of IDPs and refugees has important links with the broader process of peacebuilding. Forced displacement is one of the most visible manifestations of armed conflict and human rights violations. Peace agreements lay the ground for reintegration. As societies emerge from conflict, the pursuit of solutions to such displacement, including the voluntary return and reintegration of refugees and IDPs, is a vital component of a comprehensive peacebuilding process that can contribute to the prevention of new or secondary movements.

38. Refugees and IDPs who return to their homes on a voluntary basis and with full respect for their human rights are most likely to have a positive engagement with the reintegration and peacebuilding processes. In formulating reintegration projects, issues of protection, non-discrimination and gender equity, minority rights, access to justice and the rule of law, recognition of land ownership and property rights must be considered a high priority.

39. The return and reintegration of refugees and IDPs often runs in parallel with the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of former combatants. While UNHCR is not normally directly involved in DDR programmes, the Office recognizes the central role that such programmes can play in the process of reconciliation and peacebuilding when they are implemented in an effective and equitable manner.

C. Participatory and community-based approaches

40. Refugees, IDPs and local communities are the key actors in the reintegration process. Particular efforts will therefore be made to identify their skills, capacities, aspirations and needs, and to understand how these attributes are affected by issues such as gender, age, ethnic origin, socio-economic profile, physical and mental well-being. UNHCR underlines the importance of employing the “Age, gender and diversity mainstreaming” approach to all reintegration activities, and in this context recognizes the particular contribution that women can make to the tasks of post-conflict reconciliation, reconstruction and peacebuilding. The empowerment of women and the promotion of gender equality will consequently be central to UNHCR’s efforts in this domain.

41. In efforts to promote the reintegration process, no distinction should be made between returning refugees and IDPs. The needs of receiving communities must be taken fully into account. Neither should reintegration activities differentiate between “assisted” and “spontaneous” returnees. Assistance should be provided wherever possible on a community-wide basis, while recognizing the importance of providing support to individuals, households and groups of people with special needs.

D. Situation analysis

42. A “one size fits all” approach to the reintegration process is not feasible. The different factors which shape this in a given context may include:

- the length of time and conditions of displacement;
- the nature of the conflict which resulted in displacement;
- the degree of destruction in the area of return;
- the capacity of national and local authorities;
- the presence or absence of humanitarian or development actors; and,
- the presence or absence of peacekeeping forces.

43. At the outset, priority should be given to the timely collection, analysis, sharing and dissemination of information on these issues. This should include the collection of data on the demographic profile of the refugee, IDP and other populations concerned, including their skills, needs, intentions and aspirations. As national and local governments have primary responsibility for reintegrating their citizens, support needs to be provided to the competent authorities to facilitate the compilation and analysis of such information and its use as a basis for planning, programming and resource mobilization. Non-governmental actors can often make welcome contributions to such efforts.

E. Early preparation and planning

44. Early preparation and planning for return and reintegration is critical. Even during the emergency phase of a refugee (or IDP) movement, registration tools can already be used to capture vital information on the resources of the community, as well as data on places of origin.

45. In view of the specificities of any reintegration scenario, careful analysis of the prevailing situation in areas of return is necessary in order to identify ongoing or planned early recovery, development, human rights and reconciliation initiatives, whether by national or local authorities, development agencies, humanitarian partners or other actors. Equally important is the mapping of operational and strategic partnerships, to determine which activities can have the greatest impact and fill the most important gaps. UNHCR will take an active part in inter-agency planning for integrated United Nations missions, recovery, peacebuilding, and longer-term development strategies to ensure that the reintegration needs of the returnees and the host communities are fully taken into account in national and international strategies.

46. During their period of exile or displacement, every effort should be made to ensure that refugees and IDPs are provided with education, skills training and livelihood opportunities that will support their eventual return and reintegration. At the same time, the period of displacement may provide an important opportunity to develop leadership, advocacy, human rights, peace education, mediation and conflict resolution skills. Refugees and IDPs can also be supported to participate in peace processes which define the terms of their return and reintegration and which enable them to access and negotiate legal frameworks covering issues such as land, property and minority rights.

47. Given its presence in both countries of origin and asylum, UNHCR is well placed to facilitate a dialogue between the States concerned and to ensure that timely preparations for return and reintegration are undertaken on both sides of the border. While early recovery and development initiatives in the country of origin will take place primarily in the post-conflict period, planning for such activities should begin during the period of displacement.

F. Pragmatism and flexibility

48. In any reintegration operation, UNHCR will seek from the outset to delineate clearly the interventions for which it is best suited, to which it can bring added value and for which it will assume primary responsibility. As well as maximizing impact, this approach will improve UNHCR's predictability and facilitate the implementation of strategies for timely and responsible disengagement.

49. Activities linked to reintegration will continue to ensure that the fundamental rights of returnees and their communities are respected and protected. This will include efforts to address the question of land ownership and use; rehabilitate basic infrastructure; ensure safe places of return through supporting mine clearance and DDR; identify and make provision for people with special needs; meet at least minimum standards in the provision of food, water, shelter, education and healthcare; and support livelihood opportunities. The type and eventual scope of reintegration activities will be identified through the situation analysis. The limits of UNHCR's engagement will be determined broadly by the needs that have to be addressed in areas of return as well as the presence (or absence) and implementation capacity of other actors.

50. A degree of flexibility will be incorporated in UNHCR's reintegration planning and programming so that the Office can respond to unexpected events and changing realities on the ground, including the inability of others to meet their commitments in an effective and timely manner. Such flexibility will not be unlimited. It is clear, for example, that reintegration initiatives with high recurrent costs (e.g. constructing a hospital or a tertiary education facility) or large-scale and complex infrastructural projects (e.g. building highways and large bridges) fall outside UNHCR's mandate and competence.

51. Where an intervention does entail recurrent costs, the Office will meet those costs for a limited period of time (normally up to three years). At the same time, an accompanying strategy for the transfer of responsibility to the authorities or specialized partners will be developed. In the absence of partners, UNHCR may consider its own direct involvement in appropriate circumstances.

G. Recovery programmes and funding

52. Ensuring that returnees and returnee areas are factored into local and area-based recovery programmes as well as into national development plans and programmes is an important objective. Additional objectives are to encourage timely interventions that are key to early recovery. These can be pursued through, for example, the United Nations Country Team or Humanitarian Country Team (and clusters if they exist) and in the context of the joint United Nations-World Bank Post-Conflict Needs Assessment, integrated peacebuilding strategies, and the Common Country Assessment (CCA) and UNDAF.

53. Building and consolidating long-term strategic partnerships between humanitarian agencies and development partners, regional banks, regional organizations, bilateral donors and other relevant actors are necessary to ensure that return, reintegration, early recovery, development and peacebuilding activities are effectively synchronized. The various multilateral funding instruments – including pooled funding arrangements – that have been established to address the challenges of post-conflict transition and recovery present new opportunities for organizations to diversify their sources of funding. Such funds may be channelled by donors and financial institutions to ensure the provision of essential interventions required in a particular reintegration situation.

54. UNHCR's Executive Committee is currently considering a proposed new budget structure that incorporates a component dedicated to reintegration programmes. If approved, the Office would encourage donors to ensure that this component of the budget is properly supported, thereby enabling UNHCR to exercise its mandate to seek durable and sustainable solutions.

Part VII - Operational support

55. To ensure that UNHCR has the organizational capacity required to support the sustainable return and reintegration of displaced populations, the Office will strengthen its capacity to manage such operations.

A. Human resources

56. UNHCR will strive to ensure that reintegration operations are staffed by personnel with previous experience in this area, and that they are deployed in key positions as early as possible during the homeward movement of refugees and IDPs. To support this strategy, UNHCR will pursue standby partnership agreements and similar arrangements to develop surge capacity and

ensure the timely deployment of staff who are trained in the design, implementation and monitoring of reintegration activities, and who are familiar with the principles of community development and peacebuilding.

57. Reintegration programmes in the Field will be supported by a dedicated Headquarters unit located in the Division of Operational Support Services that is charged *inter alia* with technical advice, standard setting, the harmonization of practices, the sharing of lessons learned and the strategic coordination of reintegration, early recovery, development and peacebuilding initiatives. The Division of External Relations will increase its capacity to tap prospects for additional funding and to develop strategic partnerships with UNDP, the World Bank, and potential sources of funding and support for reintegration.

B. Tools and training

58. While remaining firmly committed to its "Framework for Durable Solutions", UNHCR will review and revise this and other tools, such as the "Handbook for Repatriation and Reintegration Activities", in the light of this policy statement. Particular attention will be given to the implications of UNHCR's new engagement with IDP situations.

59. In addition, UNHCR will mainstream reintegration-specific modules into existing learning programmes such as the Operations Management Learning Programme, the Protection Learning Programme, the Operational Data Management Learning Programme and relevant thematic learning programmes (such as that on IDPs). Particular emphasis will be placed on the development of the skills needed to establish and nurture effective organizational partnerships.

60. The Office will compile a set of examples of good practice for reintegration which can be used for training, advocacy and operational guidance purposes. UNHCR will also develop new tools, including for reintegration data management and returnee monitoring.

61. Training will also be provided to enable relevant staff to produce well-packaged and targeted appeals, with clearly stated objectives and timeframes. Such appeals will be based on the principles of results-based management, especially that of assessing and reporting on impact. It is anticipated that this initiative will include workshops with the participation of financial institutions (e.g. World Bank, African Development Bank, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and selected bilateral aid agencies) to clarify what support they can provide and to facilitate the establishment of strategic and operational partnerships.

62. UNHCR will undertake both real-time and retrospective evaluations of its major repatriation and reintegration programmes and ensure that the findings of those reviews are incorporated into the training and tools described above.

Part VIII - UNHCR's reintegration activities

63. By the nature of its mandate and competence, UNHCR's reintegration activities will, in the majority of cases, be relatively short-term in nature and impact. At the same time, the Office considers it crucial for reintegration to be sustainable, thereby contributing to the long-term welfare of the populations concerned, the viability of the peacebuilding process and the prevention of further violence and displacement. This section provides an indication of the principal reintegration activities that will usually be undertaken by the Office, while the concluding part focuses on UNHCR's disengagement from such programmes.

A. Facilitating and managing return, including needed protection interventions

64. UNHCR will engage in timely interventions that pave the way for return and facilitate the reintegration process. Given the degree of devastation and neglect suffered by many areas of return, and the constraints that this places on the homeward movement of refugees and IDPs, particular attention will be given to infrastructural rehabilitation, such as the clearing and repair of feeder or tertiary roads, and the construction of small-scale bridges, way stations, transit centres and other transportation facilities, as well as providing seeds for the first planting season and addressing land ownership issues. These immediate activities, which UNHCR considers to be essential to the repatriation and return process, will remain a core responsibility of the Office.

B. Sustaining return through basic needs and livelihood activities

65. The Office will also prioritize activities that are required to ensure the basic means of survival and to support the livelihood strategies of returnees and their communities. These include, for example, investments in shelter, potable water, schools, primary health care, agricultural activities, income generation opportunities, micro-credit schemes, and skills training.

66. Such activities, which often serve to kick-start mid- to longer-term efforts to restore social services and achieve sustainable livelihoods, are integral to UNHCR's approach to sustaining returns. The timeliness of such interventions is crucial, as is the establishment of partnerships with United Nations organizations such as UNDP, UNHabitat, UNICEF, the International Labour Organization, the Food and Agricultural Organization and the World Food Programme, as well as specialized NGOs.

67. The focus of UNHCR's activities will usually be on the non-discriminatory access to services rather than provision of services *per se*. UNHCR will undertake the construction of infrastructure or provision of basic services only where absolutely necessary to ensure access to basic rights, such as primary education. UNHCR will endeavour to mobilize partners involved in the transition and development, failing which UNHCR may have no option to appeal to donors for specific reintegration support.

C. Protection and the rule of law

68. UNHCR will engage in core protection-related activities that support the restoration of national protection and the rule of law, including returnee monitoring. These activities will focus on addressing protection needs that are linked to the ongoing effects of conflict and displacement and will normally focus on mechanisms to secure land and property rights, ensure safe places of return, access to national documentation, non-discriminatory access to services, respect for minority rights, prevention of and response to sexual and gender-based violence, and legal assistance. Training of national authorities and other key players, such as police and the military, is a key protection activity, as is support to nascent protection structures, including Human Rights Commissions and NGOs that offer legal advice.

69. Particular emphasis will be placed on locating protection mechanisms within returnee communities and contributing to the effective functioning of national judicial and law enforcement structures, including civilian police, where appropriate. UNHCR will seek to engage a range of national and local partners in such protection activities, including government institutions, civil society organizations and community leaders.

D. Reconciliation

70. Finally, UNHCR will provide support to local reconciliation processes. Building on its activities during the period of exile and displacement, UNHCR's interventions will take the form of peace education and co-existence projects, and active support to transitional justice mechanisms, with a particular focus on facilitating participation and access by returnee communities. In this context, transitional justice refers to a range of approaches that societies adopt to reckon with legacies of widespread or systematic human rights abuses as they move from a period of violent conflict or oppression towards peace, democracy, the rule of law, and respect for individual or collective rights.

Part IX - Measured disengagement

71. UNHCR has experimented with the notion of using a time-limited approach to its disengagement from reintegration programmes. But experience has shown the difficulty of setting predetermined cut-off points for the organization's presence and programmes in areas of return. Repatriation can, for example, occur over an extended period of time, while the reintegration and peacebuilding process may undergo periodic setbacks, either nationally or locally, requiring a continuing engagement on UNHCR's part. UNHCR's continued engagement with IDPs at national level will also have a bearing on when to disengage.

72. Despite these uncertainties, UNHCR considers it important to establish a framework for its involvement in reintegration programmes. The Office will therefore seek to limit its post-return activities to a maximum of three years, and will rigorously review its involvement thereafter. Such reviews will be based on a set of indicative benchmarks that will be developed in close association with partners. Given the misleading impression that can be given by the notion of "exit strategies", UNHCR will refer to this process as one of "measured disengagement".