

# CAMBODIA

## INITIAL OBJECTIVES

- Monitor the protection and reintegration of the 47,000 returnees within their communities.
- Assist returnees to reach a level of security, social integration and economic self-reliance comparable to that of communities to which they return.
- Establish linkages with assistance programmes run by longer-term development agencies to ensure seamless support during the phase-out of UNHCR's programme.
- Help national institutions strengthen their capacity to implement Cambodia's refugee legislation in accordance with its Convention obligations.

## MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS, PROGRESS ACHIEVED AND CONSTRAINTS

During the first six months of the year, UNHCR focused on consolidating its reintegration activities to ensure the sustainable reintegration of returnees following the Office's planned phase-out at the end of this year. UNHCR reinforced linkages with longer-term development programmes. Partnerships were strengthened with the Provincial Rural Development Committees in the major returnee areas. UNHCR signed an MOU with UNDP/UNOPs Cambodia Area Rehabilitation and Regeneration Project (CARERE) in Pursat, Battambang and Oddar Meanchey provinces, to ensure continuity of CARERE's activities in these provinces with a high concentration of returnees. Furthermore, UNHCR helped UNICEF to establish a presence in Oddar Meanchey province. UNHCR made intensive efforts to build capacity of national NGOs for possible hand-over of some activities to them.

UNHCR's efforts to inform other agencies and

organisations of the situation of returnees and its planned phase-out increased awareness of the needs in the returnee areas. This prompted UNHCR's partners' to make efforts to secure funds to implement activities after the withdrawal of UNHCR. The Office also promoted donor interest in the returnee areas, and increased their commitment to support reintegration. Joint UNHCR/WFP efforts for the province of Oddar Meanchey were particularly effective and led to major donor contributions to NGOs currently funded by UNHCR.

Areas in the northeast of the country to which most of the refugees chose to return remain heavily mined. This continues to constrain access to certain locations and poses a risk to staff security. The explosion of anti-tank mines on two important access roads to returnee areas earlier in the year disrupted access and slowed project implementation in Samlot, Anlong Veng and Trapaeng Prasat districts. After the explosions, UNHCR modified its returnee monitoring strategy to reduce the mine threat to its personnel. Instead of individual interviews conducted in the returnee areas, monitoring is now conducted targeting groups at markets, ceremonies, and similar gathering places. Individual interviews take place in the returnee areas, once potential protection problems have been identified.

In the first half of the year, UNHCR funded 20 partners to launch community-based QIPs in the water, health, education, agriculture and infrastructure sectors. Project sites and essential access roads were demined under the UNHCR programme. Community service activities targeted the most vulnerable returnees. They were provided with counselling, individualised assistance and were referred to relevant institutions as required. Human rights training for the population and local authorities was also conducted in districts where there is high returnee concentration.

Living conditions in the returnee areas have improved, as returnees have managed to clear land and increased the areas under cultivation. Mine accidents have decreased, as mine awareness activities continued and their impact began to be felt. Demining also enabled safe access to more villages. Returnees are enjoying access to health and education within the Cambodian national system for the first time in a number of years. Confidence in stability and continued peace in the country is reflected in the readily visible investment being made in the construction of houses and the purchase of livestock and equipment.

With the exception of occasional individual land disputes, returnees generally enjoyed relatively unhindered access to their former and new land. UNHCR intervened in land disputes involving returnees, and collaborated with the district authorities in resolving them. Various provincial level initiatives are also being taken to safeguard land rights in general, such as the creation of a Land Use Planning Unit in Battambang Province, which will also cover returnee areas. UNHCR noted few protection problems facing returnees and no evidence of discrimination or harassment based on former refugee status.

A notable exception to the generally positive land situation is the problem facing returnees formerly settled in O'smach on the Thai border in Oddar Meanchey province. Several hundred families, mainly returnees, were obliged to relocate following the approval of a real estate project. UNHCR expressed its concerns to both military and civilian authorities on numerous occasions and closely monitored the payment of compensation and the attribution of new land plots to the affected families. To date, a number of households are still waiting for their newly allocated plots to be demined or the consideration of their compensation claims. UNHCR continues to pursue the matter with the local and central authorities. One important constraint is the still fragile civilian administration emerging in this newly created province, and the difficulty for it to deal with

these complex issues.

Unlike the northwest, reintegration in the northeast was not affected by land mines or land shortage problems. Instead, returnees were warmly welcomed back to home villages and, even in some cases, achieved living standards surpassing those of their communities of return. The main constraints facing the returnees and local communities alike in the northeast are poorer infrastructure and services, when compared to the northwest. As there are few NGOs active in the area and no formal social safety net in place for the vulnerable, UNHCR entered into an agreement with an international agency to provide assistance and services for vulnerable returnees and the local poor. Funds were also provided to an NGO to strengthen health services in the area.

During the first six months of the year, there were 88 asylum-seekers and 22 refugees of various nationalities in Cambodia. Through an implementing partner, UNHCR provided material and legal assistance to asylum-seekers and refugees. Little progress was made in developing national mechanisms for the protection of asylum-seekers and refugees by adopting a sub-decree on refugees. The process was hampered primarily by the low priority accorded by the Government, which is already confronted with major development and human rights issues. There also remained widespread misperceptions amongst the general public regarding refugee matters. As a result, UNHCR focused on encouraging the authorities to recognise the need to address refugee issues comprehensively and to strengthen and consolidate local institutional capacities.

#### REVISED OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITY ACTIVITIES FOR JULY - DECEMBER

- Continue to concentrate on consolidating reintegration activities, ensuring that returnee issues are properly handed over to longer-term development actors. Close the last two field offices by the end of the year, as planned.

- The initial objective for refugee matters will remain unchanged. Continue to undertake refugee status determination and ensure the protection of refugees in the absence of a national asylum framework. Carry out information, training and other

local capacity building measures for government officials and immigration officers to facilitate the establishment of such a framework, thereby assisting the Cambodian Government to fulfil its responsibilities under the 1951 Convention.

### FINANCIAL DATA (USD)

	Initial Budget	Revised Budget	Total Funds Available*	Total Funds Obligated
AB and TF	3,739,571	3,779,565	2,885,212	1,968,700

\*Includes income from unrestricted contributions, income from contributions restricted to the region, opening balance and adjustments.

