

# WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

Benin	Chad	Guinea	Nigeria
Burkina Faso	Côte d'Ivoire	Guinea-Bissau	Sao Tomé and Príncipe
Cameroon	Gabon	Liberia	Senegal
Cape Verde	Gambia	Mali	Sierra Leone
Central African Republic	Ghana	Niger	Togo

## Recent Developments

The current socio-political environment in West and Central Africa can be described as an “unstable equilibrium” with a potential for further conflict and displacement. This requires the agency to remain on alert for possible emergency interventions and to further develop its capacity for conflict detection and prevention. The need for enhanced flexibility from donors in the implementation of assistance programmes is more critical than ever.

The security climate was particularly dire in Sierra Leone where the refusal of Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels to disarm culminated in a new offensive in areas within 50 kms of the capital Freetown. More than 50,000 new IDPs were registered in and around Freetown and over 500 UNAMSIL peacekeepers were taken hostage, prompting the UN to reinforce its troops and begin negotiations with rebel leaders for their liberation. With the country sliding back towards full-scale civil war, the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration process as well as the overall implementation of the Lomé Peace Agreement seemed increasingly elusive.

Until December 1999, when the elected government in Côte d'Ivoire was overthrown and a military government installed, the country was viewed as an island of stability amid turbulent West Africa. Since then, the economy has fallen into recession and the future of millions of people, many of whom fled wars or poverty in Burkina Faso, Ghana, Liberia, Mali and other countries, is uncertain. A referendum on a new constitution took place in July, paving the way for presidential elections in October.

Continued instability in the northern provinces of Liberia, particularly Lofa county, rendered return and reintegration there practically impossible. Other parts of the country still lack basic services, making it difficult for returnees to resume their lives. Reports of the Government's alleged involvement in illicit trade in diamonds from Sierra Leone prompted major donors to reduce their already limited aid to Liberia.

Public unrest and demonstrations in Guinea to contest the results of communal elections in June and the ongoing trial of an opposition leader resulted in both injury and deaths.

## Strategic Objectives: Progress and Constraints

Although the overall budget for the region remained largely unaffected by the need to prioritise activities, lack of funding made it necessary to offset any new needs by reducing other, already planned activities. For example, the decision to extend repatriation and reintegration of Liberian refugees until the end of 2000 was difficult to implement. Lack of funds in Côte d'Ivoire slowed repatriation movements and by the time organised repatriation ended in June, more than 3,800 refugees who had registered for voluntary repatriation were still awaiting departure. Some of UNHCR's NGO partners had to pre-finance their activities and funds foreseen for local integration in Guinea had to be diverted to cover repatriation costs. Reintegration activities in Liberia were also affected: only USD 1 million of the additional USD 2.1 million required to continue activities until the end of the year have been obtained so far. Failure to raise the additional funds will lead to the termination of most activities, including

those for returnee women and young girls (income-generation, literacy training and human rights counselling), by September.

In spite of a complex political situation, organised voluntary repatriation of Liberian refugees was completed in June. More than 22,600 Liberians were assisted to return home during the past six months. The last refugees from Guinea-Bissau were also repatriated from Guinea in June. The planned repatriation of refugees to Chad proceeded relatively well, with over 2,500 refugees having returned from the Central African Republic and Cameroon by 30 June. In light of developments in Sierra Leone, UNHCR revised downwards its planning figure for voluntary repatriation from 170,000 to 50,000, a target which remains under constant review.

UNHCR's ability to support urban refugees with educational grants and training courses was reduced due to the general lack of funds for the region. Only up to one third of the requests for educational support could be granted. The Office continued to emphasise the special needs of women and children, particularly concerning health issues and food distribution in all country programmes. The strategy was to focus on women heads of household to ensure that they had equal access to protection and assistance.

Despite UNHCR's efforts to improve the protection regime in the region, the incorporation of refugee law into national laws and the establishment of national eligibility committees were delayed in Cameroon, Chad and Guinea-Bissau. Meanwhile, UNHCR elaborated ad hoc procedures in co-operation with the concerned governments. Progress was made in Guinea and Togo where a national law on refugees, incorporating the tenets of the international refugee instruments, was passed by the respective parliaments in May.

## Activities until 30 June

The agency's refugee programmes in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone are

described in subsequent chapters.

In **Benin**, UNHCR pursued its pilot resettlement project with 34 refugees effectively integrated locally during the reporting period. One of the main obstacles has been the refugees' preference for resettlement. A comprehensive information campaign was therefore conducted to increase their awareness and understanding of local integration initiatives. More than 430 Togolese and seven Nigerian refugees were resettled, some 730 refugees from the **Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)** awaiting resettlement were assisted to meet their basic needs, and 430 asylum-seekers (340 from the DRC) were granted refugee status.

The recent crisis between UNHCR and refugees in **Burkina Faso** (some of whom were contesting the criteria for inclusion in a pilot resettlement project currently under way through violent protests and occupation of office premises) led the agency to propose a re-evaluation of the project. Recommendations included corrective measures to ensure better understanding of protection principles and criteria by the refugees as well as stronger involvement by the Government in the management of various refugee groups.

UNHCR pursued the voluntary repatriation of Chadian refugees from **Cameroon**. Following "go-and-see" visits in February, some 2,270 rural refugees returned home in eight convoys. The agency is planning to organise further visits to returnee sites and subsequently repatriate another 840 Chadian refugees from urban areas before the end of the year. This will finalise the voluntary repatriation of Chadian refugees from this country. Given the funding shortage and the sharp increase in the number of urban asylum-seekers approaching the office in Yaoundé (1,000), assistance focused on health and other basic needs. Six micro-projects were initiated for urban refugees. A first group of 320 refugees from the DRC (out of a total of 750) departed on resettlement while screening continued for the remaining group.

Recent fighting in north-western DRC has trig-

gered population movements along and across the Oubangui River, creating a trickle of new arrivals into the **Central African Republic (CAR)**. Other refugees are reportedly hiding in the forest. At the time of writing, an estimated 2,500 refugees have crossed the border and UNHCR is updating a contingency plan for up to 10,000 people. These developments – coupled with the effects of the fuel crisis that began in April – have led to a dramatic increase in operating costs, jeopardising UNHCR's ability to fund other planned activities (such as repatriation of Chadian refugees, food and health assistance to vulnerable Sudanese refugees, local integration for 13,000 Congolese and 2,500 Chadian refugees, financial assistance for needy urban refugees and solutions for Rwandan refugees). Achievements included: support for the voluntary repatriation of over 280 Chadian refugees; transport assistance for some 2,000 Congolese refugees returning to Kinshasa; the attainment of self-sufficiency in food for the majority of the 34,000 Sudanese refugees; and the agreement by a third country to resettle 100 Sudanese refugees. The planned reforestation project did not begin due to lack of funds.

The political and military situation in **Chad** deteriorated recently with the resurgence of rebel activity in the northern parts of the country.

Fortunately, the situation in the south was stable enough to allow for the repatriation of 2,550 Chadian refugees to their areas of origin (280 from CAR and 2,270 from Cameroon). Up to 4,700 Chadians are now expected to return in 2000 (planning figures have been substantially reduced as the refugees have hesitated to register for voluntary repatriation). The planned three-year reintegration project did not get off the ground due to various political factors. UNHCR expects to start the project in October following a planned re-evaluation of reintegration activities in Central Africa. Assistance to Chadians in the asylum countries will be reduced as the refugees gain greater self-reliance through micro-projects, increased food security and access to services in host communities. The 23,000 Sudanese refugees living in eastern Chad are not yet self-sufficient in food production as harvests were affected due to infertile land and lack of insecticides.

Some of the refugees who arrived in **Gabon** from the Republic of the Congo in late 1999 have recently begun to return spontaneously (mostly former civil servants). According to the results of the latest registration exercise, more than 14,200 Congolese refugees are currently hosted in five different provinces and an additional 3,200 refugees are registered in urban areas. To stimulate a favorable environment con-



ducive to voluntary repatriation, UNHCR is sponsoring a fact-finding visit of key refugee representatives and preparations are underway for the signing of a tri-partite agreement. Achievements during the reporting period included: provision of basic foodstuffs to refugees in Nyanga and Haut-Ogooué until April (WFP began to provide food as of May); establishment of a logistics network for distribution of assistance to refugees in over 30 locations; renovation of three wells in Nyanga and the beginning of construction of three wells in Haut-Ogooué; completion of 150 latrines in Nyanga; purchase of basic medicines (through NGO partners) for distribution in clinics servicing refugees; supply of tools and materials for refugee-constructed shelters in Nyanga; identification of a network of social workers in urban centres to assist vulnerable refugees to become self-sufficient; and organisation of two protection seminars for local authorities.

In **Gambia**, clashes between the ruling party and opposition groups left several people dead during street confrontations in April. UNHCR continued to assist over 400 Senegalese refugees from the Casamance region as well as 900 Sierra Leoneans by improving and extending camp facilities and water systems, and by providing education and food. The agency also supported 150 vulnerable urban refugees out of an estimated total of 15,000. A verification and re-registration exercise launched jointly with the Government and national NGOs has recorded 6,020 refugees within the Greater Banjul area. This operation will continue until another 3,500 asylum-seekers from Sierra Leone and the Casamance region of Senegal have been interviewed and registered. Sierra Leonean refugees (90 per cent of the urban refugees) will continue to receive support towards local integration and self-sufficiency until their voluntary repatriation can be envisaged.

In **Ghana**, most of the assistance previously provided to more than 8,000 Liberian refugees in Buduburam camp was terminated in June. However, some 1,000 new Liberian refugees arrived during the reporting period in search of

resettlement opportunities. In March, the Ghana Refugee Board began to screen Liberian refugees in the camp to identify those still in need of international protection. The Government also alluded to possible plans to develop a new refugee site some 125 kms east of Accra to respond to recent xenophobic attitudes towards Liberian refugees. The site has good farming potential and two schools and one health post are accessible in a nearby village, but water supply and sanitary structures are non-existent. Meanwhile, half of the 410 newly arrived Sierra Leoneans were transferred to Krisan camp and UNHCR made plans to construct 50 new houses to decongest the transit centre in Accra. More than 1,000 Sierra Leonean refugees in Krisan camp are actively involved in farming and income-generating activities. To help this refugee population cope with the effects of human rights abuses experienced by some of its members, UNHCR has established a community-based home visit programme and offers counselling for those suffering from trauma and depression. WFP provided wheat, corn-soy a blend and vegetable oil for the Sierra Leoneans in Krisan camp.

After nine years in exile, on 22 June the ninth and final flight sponsored by UNHCR completed the repatriation of refugees from Guinea to **Guinea-Bissau**, where the newly elected government continues to coexist uneasily with the former military junta. A total of 468 refugees returned home to Bissau town and other provincial and rural destinations. UNHCR continued to assist some 700 Senegalese refugees from Casamance at the site in Jolmète by providing access to potable water, health services, medicines and primary education. However, the planned relocation of some 120 Senegalese refugees from the border to Jolmète was delayed as the refugees resisted the move. More than 300 urban refugees received protection and medical assistance in Bissau.

In **Mali**, UNHCR continued to provide international protection to some 2,300 refugees (of whom 1,300 are from Sierra Leone). The Faraouaran transit camp is now fully operational and accessible to asylum-seekers and vulnerable



refugees. Only a minority of the refugees were assisted there with food, health care, education and income-generation at the end of June. In view of the current financial constraints, recognised refugees received medical assistance and only the most vulnerable refugees received other forms of assistance. Most refugees in Mali are well integrated amongst the local population and engage in various income-generating activities such as hairdressing, sewing, construction, cloth-dyeing and soap-making. More than 50 refugees were resettled during the reporting period. Recently, the President of Mali - in his role as Chairman of ECOWAS - has been very active in addressing the security situation in Sierra Leone and Liberia. The situation in northern Mali remained relatively stable with some minor security incidents reported during the first quarter in the regions of Gao and Timbuktu.

In **Niger**, the return to democracy in late 1999 was a promising development for the 3,500 returnees living in the country's northern and eastern provinces, but recent troubles between various military groups could easily translate into more political unrest in the future. UNHCR pursued its modest support towards the socio-economic development of the returnee communities, mainly through community-based initiatives and training. The first semester of 2000 saw the cleansing of the fishpond of Tarbiyat in Tillabéry and the drilling of wells to eventually permit small-scale gardening in seven sites in Tahoua. Small-scale gardening was also introduced in the Agadez region. The most needy among the urban refugees received financial assistance and 13 refugee students were given educational grants.

Religious tensions are once again on the rise with Islamic Sharia law now established in five of the northern states (Kano, Zamfara, Sokoto, Niger and Kebbi) in **Nigeria**. Reports indicate that Christians have recently been moving away from these areas of the country. As a result, registration for the voluntary repatriation of some 3,000 Chadian refugees living in the north was postponed. UNHCR protected more than 6,900 refugees, but only 1,820 refu-

gees (mostly Sierra Leoneans in Oru Camp) were assisted with education, skills-training and income-generating activities. Assistance for the remaining Liberian refugees ended in June (except for vulnerable individuals who continued to receive food and medical attention) following the completion of organised repatriation. Only the most needy urban refugees received allowances. Thirty-four refugees received educational grants and seven were helped with micro-credits.

Unless a major positive shift occurs in the ongoing negotiations between the Government of **Senegal** and the 18-year old Casamance independence movement, the steady deterioration of the security environment (leading to an increasingly tense relationship between Senegal and Guinea-Bissau) is likely to continue. Local authorities and relief organisations have reported population movements in the region of Kolda, where some 3,400 displaced people fled border incidents with Guinea-Bissau in late July. Following disagreements over an irrigation project on the Senegal river, Mauritania rescinded at the last minute an expulsion order that could have sent tens of thousands of Senegalese living in Mauritania back to their country of origin. UNHCR continued to monitor the situation of some 20,000 Mauritanian refugees living in four departments in the river valley of Senegal. The issue of identity documents for this group has not yet been resolved as the authorities, who claimed that the refugees had never been granted permanent refugee status, subsequently suspended the registration campaign launched in May. The refugees will now have to introduce new claims before the national eligibility committee. Meanwhile, UNHCR provided limited assistance for home gardening and micro-projects (primarily for women) as well as ad-hoc assistance in health and through the distribution of domestic items. The Office also continued to protect and assist a growing number of urban refugees and asylum-seekers (over 5,000 persons are awaiting a decision on their status) with medical costs, educational grants, and help to start income-generating activities.

In Togo, an agreement was finally reached for the establishment of a national electoral commission to facilitate democratisation. At the end of May, Togo hosted about 12,200 refugees, the majority Ghanaians living in rural areas of the north, some of whom have expressed a desire to return to Ghana. UNHCR is planning to field a registration mission to the area at the end of the rainy season to ascertain the exact number of refugees wishing to repatriate. Of more than 1,000 urban refugees, 770 received help with health services, subsistence allowances and educational fees, and grants were provided for micro-projects. Three Rwandan refugees were resettled and one Rwandan refugee prepared to repatriate voluntarily.

## Outlook for July – December

Provided sufficient financial resources are made available to UNHCR in the second half of the year, the repatriation of refugees to Chad will continue, as will support to Liberian refugees who wish to return on an individual basis. Solutions will continue to be sought for those who are unable to repatriate. UNHCR

will also step up emergency preparedness concerning the situation at the border between Senegal and Guinea-Bissau. Developments in Sierra Leone will be closely monitored so that plans for voluntary repatriation in asylum countries are kept up-to-date and adequate return and reintegration programmes are established together with other UN agencies, NGOs and the Sierra Leonean Government.

## FINANCIAL DATA (USD)

Countries	Initial Budget		Revised Budget		Total Funds Available*		Total Funds Obligated	
	AP and TF	SP	AP and TF	SP	AP and TF	SP	AP and TF	SP
Benin	1'111'675	0	1'171'472	0	321'100	0	321'100	0
Burkina Faso	233'500	0	232'800	0	91'400	0	91'400	0
Cameroon	612'097	0	1'035'005	0	521'600	0	521'600	0
Central African Republic	2'984'387	0	3'045'789	0	1'101'250	0	1'101'250	0
Chad	941'471	0	2'064'087	0	1'045'300	0	1'045'300	0
Côte d'Ivoire**	8'855'356	0	10'812'130	0	5'004'075	0	4'966'600	0
Gabon	290'000	0	2'751'438	0	864'500	0	864'500	0
Gambia	867'100	117'000	868'793	0	324'000	0	324'000	0
Ghana	1'209'861	0	1'213'861	0	409'500	0	409'500	0
Guinea	28'438'514	3'492'000	29'381'558	3'100'000	13'553'264	0	13'376'889	0
Guinea-Bissau	392'836	0	393'642	0	299'044	0	179'200	0
Liberia	16'362'412	1'248'000	17'629'432	1'800'000	10'097'682	0	10'029'400	0
Mali	293'363	0	291'958	0	812'210	0	140'200	0
Niger	267'400	0	267'400	0	367'480	0	154'000	0
Nigeria	1'324'726	0	1'249'645	0	586'100	0	586'100	0
Senegal	1'532'429	0	1'522'221	0	601'400	0	601'400	0
Sierra Leone	1'313'930	10'990'282	1'151'653	9'470'975	1'115'916	4'766'318	546'700	560'000
Togo	409'391	0	399'990	0	127'200	0	127'200	0
Regional Projects***	836'500	0	836'500	0	335'907	2'788'288	228'000	0
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>68'276'948</b>	<b>15'847'282</b>	<b>76'319'374</b>	<b>#####</b>	<b>37'578'928</b>	<b>7'554'606</b>	<b>35'614'339</b>	<b>560'000</b>
Liaison Unit at Headquarter	930'990	0	865'926	0	359'024	0	359'024	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>69'207'938</b>	<b>15'847'282</b>	<b>77'185'300</b>	<b>14'370'975</b>	<b>37'937'952</b>	<b>7'554'606</b>	<b>35'973'363</b>	<b>560'000</b>

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

\*\*Includes administrative costs for the Regional Director's Office.

\*\*\*Covers voluntary repatriation assistance, resettlement assistance and scholarships for refugee students in West African countries.