

SIERRA LEONE

INITIAL OBJECTIVES

- Provide protection and limited assistance to some 6,000 Liberian refugees residing in Freetown, Bo and Kenema areas; review the protection requirements of Liberians who do not wish to repatriate to their country of origin; facilitate local integration of those in need of international protection and identify resettlement opportunities as required.
- Assess how the socio-economic, political and security situation in Sierra Leone will affect the needs of Sierra Leonean returnees; compile Returnee District Area Profiles taking into account the security needs of potential returnees to those districts; should the security situation continue to improve, facilitate and later promote the voluntary repatriation of Sierra Leonean refugees and help them reintegrate into their communities of origin.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS, PROGRESS ACHIEVED AND CONSTRAINTS

Liberian Refugees

In view of the completion of organised repatriation of Liberian refugees in December 1999, UNHCR began to screen the remaining 6,000 refugees individually in order to determine their need for continued international protection. The Office also continued to identify resettlement opportunities for deserving refugees. Interviews with refugees indicate that many refugee children have been unable to attend school due to poverty.

The general security situation for Liberian refugees remained relatively stable, since they mostly reside in areas around Freetown, Bo and Kenema and have therefore been largely unaffected by the resumption of armed conflict in the northern and eastern parts of the country. However, several Liberian refugees reported facing harassment, allegedly by police, militia forces or civilians.

UNHCR continued to provide limited assis-

tance for refugees in primary health care, education (scholarships) and micro-credits. The latter project, which aims to increase self-sufficiency among refugees (particularly women) was launched in Freetown at the beginning of the year and is currently being expanded to the towns of Bo and Kenema. In addition, extremely vulnerable refugees received food, financial assistance, domestic items and shelter materials on a case-by-case basis. UNHCR made a counselling service available to needy refugees and addressed a number of protection-related problems. As small numbers of new asylum-seekers continued to arrive from Liberia and other countries, and given the absence of refugee status determination procedures within national structures, UNHCR continued to carry out this function.

Sierra Leonean Returnees

The renewal of the conflict in Sierra Leone in May reinforced scepticism about the peace process among refugees in asylum countries. Plans to begin to promote voluntary repatriation in April have been revised and the initial planning figure of 170,000 has been reduced to 50,000 returnees in 2000. This figure remains under constant review and may be further adjusted depending on political and security developments over the next few months. UNHCR's overall strategy remains based on a phased approach of monitoring refugees who return spontaneously, followed by "facilitating" returns until security and other conditions make it possible to organise repatriation convoys.

With the exception of Pujehun district, the prevailing security situation made it difficult to monitor the situation in areas of return. During the first six months of the year, UNHCR undertook monitoring missions to Pujehun (Makpele and Sorogbema chiefdoms), Kenema, Kailahun and Kambia districts. Local authorities in the main towns in Pujehun and Kenema districts (both under Government and UNAMSIL control) reported a steady increase in the number of returnees during the first quarter. About 5,000 people are estimated to have arrived there since the beginning of the year,

while others are believed to have gone directly to their places of origin. In Kailahun and Kamibia districts (both under Revolutionary United Front - RUF - control) the number of returnees was limited to a trickle, concentrating on areas and towns considered safe rather than on places of origin. Many RUF-held towns lack even the most basic health and educational services, and starvation is reportedly widespread. The highest concentration of returnees in those districts was found in Daru town (Kailahun district) where local authorities registered some 2,500 returnees since the beginning of the year. Until the upsurge in fighting in May, some refugees were also observed to be returning temporarily to assess the situation and prepare agricultural land in anticipation of a more permanent return after the rainy season.

It was not possible to commence a systematic compilation of Returnee District Area Profiles due to the fluid security situation in the main areas of return. However, UNHCR's information management regarding Sierra Leonean refugees was reviewed by an internal specialist whose recommendations - both in relation to UNHCR's refugee databases in asylum countries and their transferability to Sierra Leone, and in relation to baseline data on main areas of return - are described in further detail below.

To enhance planning and preparedness, UNHCR attended a variety of co-ordination meetings with other agencies in Freetown and Kenema. An internal Repatriation and Reintegration Cell consisting of officers in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea co-ordinates UNHCR's preparations in meetings with guidance and support from the Regional Directorate in Abidjan. A reintegration strategy has been developed and project proposals addressing the needs of Sierra Leonean returnees have been formulated in close co-operation with potential NGO partners. The projects cover immediate assistance to returnees in the form of repatriation packages as well as community-based reintegration projects (QIPs) in main areas of return and are intended to benefit all war-affected groups (returnees, resettled IDPs, ex-combatants and resident local populations). To address the needs of returning women and young girls and plan future projects, a study was carried out by staff seconded to UNHCR

by UNIFEM. Short-term objectives include building the capacity of local women's organisations and NGOs to address returnee women's need for social support (particularly victims of violence) as well as reproductive health and activities fostering self-reliance.

Within the framework of the Brookings Process - which aims to bridge institutional as well as funding gaps in post-conflict situations - and in close co-operation with UNDP and the World Bank, UNHCR has taken the lead in developing a "Brookings Menu" for Sierra Leone with inputs from most of the humanitarian agencies present in the country. The aim is to attract additional attention and funding for Sierra Leone. So far, the Menu has allowed humanitarian agencies to identify projects that do not clearly fall under the normal categorisation of either relief or development.

REVISED OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITY ACTIVITIES FOR JULY - DECEMBER

Liberian Refugees

UNHCR expects to conclude screening interviews to determine the status of the remaining Liberians by August. A significant proportion of the individuals interviewed so far deserve continued international protection and discussions with the Government regarding their future will therefore be necessary. Their needs for tracing, family reunification, primary education and proper documentation are tremendous, particularly among female-headed households and other vulnerable categories.

UNHCR's priority objectives for Liberian refugees will be to:

- Complete the screening of Liberian refugees to determine each individual's need for protection and facilitate family tracing through ICRC and other relevant agencies;
- Negotiate with the Government regarding refugee or humanitarian status for those who have been identified to be in need of continued international protection and devise a programme to provide assistance for their local integration and self-reliance;
- Continue limited assistance for primary health care, primary education and income-

generation for recognised refugees and their children and expand the micro-credit scheme to Bo and Kenema;

- Pay special attention to vulnerable groups and provide them with food, shelter and counselling as required; and
- Identify resettlement opportunities for deserving individuals and continue to monitor the situation of remaining Liberian refugees.

Sierra Leonean Returnees

Short of major improvements in security, UNHCR will primarily focus on the monitoring of spontaneous returnees and begin to provide community-based assistance in safe and accessible areas. Should the situation stabilise, refugees residing in Guinea and Liberia may begin to return to Freetown, Pujehun and Kenema districts as well as to parts of Kailahun and Kambia districts towards the end of the rainy season. The Office will therefore remain prepared to co-ordinate repatriation as well as to provide a rapid response to any new emergency that may arise. The office in Kenema (established in April 2000) will allow UNHCR to expand its field presence and monitoring in the eastern districts over the coming months. Security permitting, another office will be opened in Zimmi in the autumn to cover operations in the south, especially in Pujehun district.

UNHCR's primary objectives for Sierra Leonean returnees will be to:

- Ensure more systematic and proactive protection monitoring of returnees, focusing on human rights as well as property issues, tracing and family reunification;
- Initiate community-based QIPs focusing on the most urgent needs in health, sanitation, water, shelter, education and income-generation and provide special assistance

for returnees who are ex-combatants (including child soldiers), survivors of violence, separated minors, war widows and other single-parent households;

- Procure and pre-position non-food items for IDPs and returnees from abroad;
- Acquire and pre-position equipment (vehicles, trucks, communications, etc.) required for repatriation and monitoring of return areas and help NGO partners obtain the necessary start-up means;
- Sign tri-partite agreements with the Sierra Leonean Government and major asylum countries in preparation for a voluntary repatriation operation;
- Establish, together with OCHA, an inter-agency Management Information System with the aim to improve information collection, processing, storage and presentation regarding rehabilitation and reconstruction in Sierra Leone by (i) establishing a common digital map of Sierra Leone; (ii) creating a digital library of needs and resource assessments; (iii) expanding the current OCHA intervention matrix into an assistance information system; and (iv) consolidating the existing IDP and refugee databases into a compatible refugee and IDP information system; and
- Pursue the Brookings Process, in collaboration with UNDP and the World Bank, to ensure the best possible linkages and transition from emergency relief to longer-term reconstruction and recovery in Sierra Leone, and establish operational linkages and mechanisms with respective Brookings partners as a means of avoiding duplication and creating synergies between agencies' efforts.

FINANCIAL DATA (USD)

	Initial Budget	Revised Budget	Total Funds Available*	Total Funds Obligated
AB and TF	1,313,930	1,151,653	1,115,916	546,700
SP	10,990,282	9,470,975	4,766,318	560,000
TOTAL	12,304,212	10,622,628	5,882,234	1,106,700

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