

**Towards the Local Integration of Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees in
West Africa through enhancing self reliance and promoting
Regional integration**

Regional Framework

April 2008

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I. Background

1. The conflicts in Sierra Leone and Liberia, although ended, produced massive population movements. The Mano River Union (MRU) plus Côte d'Ivoire Peace and Security Conference, held in November 2006, acknowledged that return and reintegration of refugees in Sierra Leone and Liberia have been vital to regional peace and security. Further, it stressed the need to ensure a durable solution for refugees who wish to remain in their asylum countries. A similar conclusion was recognized at the Regional Experts Meeting on Sustainable Solutions to situations of Forced Displacement in West Africa in 2005 and again at the Mano River Union United Nations Country Teams meeting in December 2006. Later, the decision was made to include Ghana, Nigeria and The Gambia which host significant numbers of Liberian and/or Sierra Leonean refugees. Consultations and assessments took place at UNHCR Headquarters and in the Field, culminating in a Regional meeting, held in Abidjan in May 2007, aimed at developing a Regional Local Integration Strategy. In June 2007, the large-scale organized repatriation of Liberian refugees was completed while that of Sierra Leonean refugees ended in December 2004. Thereafter, mandated to search for durable solution, UNHCR made the local integration of refugees remaining in asylum countries its key strategic priority in West Africa. Finally, the present initiative is part of UNHCR Asylum-Migration 10-point plan of action, in search of protection and improving protection environments in the region, to reduce the number of people migrating irregularly.

2. This document is a framework to promote economic, social and legal integration for 14,000 Sierra Leonean and 79,000¹ Liberian refugees who have thus far rejected a return to their country of origin to remain in asylum countries: Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Gambia, Guinea, Ghana, and Nigeria. It takes into account that, as a result of the marked improvement of the situation in Sierra Leone since the end on the civil conflict in 2002, UNHCR has completed consultations with the Sierra Leonean Government and asylum countries for the declaration of a cessation clause foreseen the 1969 OAU Convention in the course of 2008. Once the cessation clause comes into effect, all refugees who will not be deemed as having a legitimate fear of persecution will see their refugee status come to an end. A similar process has been initiated for Liberian refugees.

3. Self Reliance is defined as the social and economic ability of an individual, a household, or a community to meet essential needs, including protection, food, water, shelter, personal safety, health and education, with dignity and sustainability. As a programme approach, it refers to developing and strengthening livelihoods of persons of concern and reducing their vulnerability and long term-reliance on humanitarian assistance. Local integration, in the

¹ Numbers may change as a result of further return movements

context of the ECOWAS² region, will entail that refugees, who opt to locally integrate will enjoy all the rights of establishment, residence and freedom of movement afforded to ECOWAS citizen by the 1975 Treaty, its 1979 Protocol relating to Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment and four supplementary protocols. This will also apply to those refugees whose status will cease following the forthcoming cessation clause (2008 for Sierra Leonean refugees and 2009 for Liberian refugees). Implementation of the ECOWAS protocols varies between countries. Thus, it will be incumbent upon UNHCR, in close cooperation with the ECOWAS Commission, to ensure that refugees opting to remain in their countries of asylum would enjoy the rights contained in the ECOWAS protocols. It should be noted that, with the exception of Ghana, all Governments in the region have, through enacting legislation or adopting policies, formally expressed support for the local integration of Sierra Leonean and Liberian refugees on their soil.

II. Guiding principles of the initiative

4. **Regional while accommodating country specificities.** The circumstances of refugees residing in each of the countries vary. Projects and activities will respond to the specific needs of refugees in each asylum country, respecting the diversity in national law and policy. Also activities undertaken in the region will be coherent to achieve a global peace and security objective.

5. **Multi-year to achieve objectives.** Local integration is a 2-3 year process, not an event. It has started in most countries, primarily with refugees taking the initiative themselves through, for example, marriage and settling with the host population. The present initiative commenced in July 2007. Depending on specific country needs and the particular circumstances of refugees, it will last until December 2010.

6. **Interagency to ensure sustainability.** While UNHCR is mandated to cooperate with asylum countries to find permanent solutions, it has neither the expertise nor the long term involvement required to ensure the sustainable integration of refugees. This initiative therefore relies on effective partnerships with development organizations.

7. **Intensive collaboration with national governments.** The Local Integration of refugees in asylum countries will follow a two-tier principle of (1) compliance with and adaptation to national programs, economies and social networks and (2) the mobilization and non-discriminatory application of national laws and protection mechanisms for refugees. Country commitment and ownership of the process is a pre-condition for successful integration.

8. **Rights-based and consistent with national and regional development**

² 15 member West African organization pursuing regional economic integration

priorities. The Local Integration of refugees is in harmony with efforts towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals and dovetails neatly into ECOWAS' regional integration objectives.

9. **Community based while providing individual assistance as needed.** Support provided will aim at facilitating the integration of refugees within existing communities. Support to communities rather than individuals will therefore be favored. Refugees requiring individual assistance, such as those with extreme vulnerabilities or those residing in urban settings, may however be provided with such.

III. Statistics and profile of the refugee population in the sub-region

	Sierra Leonean	Liberians
Guinea	2,000	12,817
Sierra Leone	-----	8,738
Cote d'Ivoire	342	24,147
Ghana	426	26,967
Nigeria	1,606	5,528
Liberia	3,563	-----
The Gambia	6,465	795
Total	14,402	78,992

10. The refugee population is extremely young with close to 50 percent overall under the age of 18. Females make up 54 percent of the overall population. In Guinea, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire, refugees are mainly of rural origin and involved in farming. The population in Ghana, Nigeria, The Gambia, and Liberia is either of urban origin or has become urbanized.

11. Most refugees in Guinea, Sierra Leone, Ghana and Liberia have been living in camps while in Côte d'Ivoire and The Gambia, they have mostly been living amongst the local populations.

12. Except those in Nigeria, the Gambia and Ghana, refugees generally belong to ethnic groups represented in the asylum country. Limited French, the official language in Guinea and in Côte d'Ivoire, has been an obstacle towards integration.

IV. Legal framework and the role of ECOWAS

13. All countries in the region are parties to the main international and

regional refugee instruments: the 1951 *Convention relating to the status of refugees* and its 1967 Protocol and the 1969 OAU *Convention governing the specific aspects of refugee problems in Africa*. They are also all parties to the 1975 Treaty of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) as well as its 1979 *Protocol A/P.1/5/79 relating to Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment* and four supplementary protocols.

14. Due to the nature of their displacement, almost all Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees were recognized on a *prima facie* basis under the extended definition of refugee in the OAU Convention. However, as a result of the significant changes in circumstances in both countries, consultations have commenced to invoke the cessation clause possibly in 2008 for Sierra Leonean refugees and 2009 for Liberians.

15. Given the end of assisted repatriation, the impending declaration of the cessation clause, and the fact that third country resettlement is confined to individual, protection-based cases, medical cases, and legacy family reunification processing, UNHCR's durable solution for Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees in the region is local integration. Also, the ECOWAS protocols on free movement, especially the right of residence guaranteed, offer a unique solution to Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees. The protocols confer on them secure legal residence, including the right to work. Domestic legal provisions governing residence and naturalization also offer a range of secure legal status possibilities for the remaining Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees in the seven countries of the region where they are most populous.

16. While naturalization is the best mechanism for local integration, as it provides refugees with the fullest range of rights and the highest degree of assimilation into their new national community, many refugees do not wish to naturalize because most countries in the region do not offer dual nationality. Thus, refugees opting to become new citizens of one country would have to give up their existing citizenship for another.

17. UNHCR has a very strong working relationship with ECOWAS. The efforts to expand cooperation on local integration within the ECOWAS space and promote harmonization of national legislation regarding freedom of movement are explicitly mentioned in the UNHCR-ECOWAS Memorandum of Understanding of November 2001. Also, a multipartite agreement was signed in July 2007 between the Liberia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, ECOWAS, and UNHCR to provide the legal framework for the local integration of Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees in Nigeria.

18. Equal treatment of refugees who are ECOWAS citizens, as compared to non refugees, in exercising their rights to free movement, residence, and establishment, was tabled at a technical expert meeting held in Accra in September 2007. This was a result of UNHCR advocacy. In its report, the

Technical Committee on trade, customs and free movement of persons reaffirmed the applicability of the ECOWAS treaty and protocols to community refugees. It further recommended that (1) countries of origin issue travel documents to their citizen, (2) that countries comply with the protocol by granting the right of residence to ECOWAS member states citizen including to community refugees, and (3) that the three-year renewable validity period of the residence permit should be abided by. This recommendation will be submitted to ECOWAS June 2008 statutory session of the ECOWAS Heads of State and Government. It is also worth noting that during the Summit held in Abuja, Nigeria on 15th July 2007, a commitment was made by ECOWAS Heads of States, to put in place by 2020 a Community of People in West Africa. This will further strengthen the right of all ECOWAS country nationals to establish their residence anywhere in the region.

V. Scope of the programme

19. At the end of the process, refugees who choose to locally integrate or those whose status will cease, as a result of the coming to effect of the cessation clause, will be granted rights and entitlements, commensurate with those enjoyed by the ECOWAS citizens of long-term foreign residents legally in the host country. They include freedom of movement, access to education and the labour market, access to property, access to valid travel & identity documents; and access to the realization of family unity. Regarding economic integration, refugees will progressively be less reliant on state or humanitarian assistance to meaningfully contribute to the economy of the host country. Culturally, refugees are expected to acclimatize to the environment outside the camp, accommodated by the host communities. Ultimately, it is expected that refugees and host populations, interactively, will live side by side, without discrimination or exploitation, having the freedom and socio-economic space to contribute to the asylum country's economy and social life.

Phase I: July - December 2007 Transitional period

20. Needs assessments have been refined or carried out; arrangements and negotiations with host populations and local authorities have been initiated; partners have been identified. In Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia some pilot projects aimed at promoting local integration have been initiated.

Phase II: 2008 - 2010 Full programme Implementation.

21. Activities will be implemented at the country level and regionally through cross border activities and other initiatives aimed at consolidating peace and stability in the Mano River Union. These activities will focus on HIV/AIDS, Peace & Reconciliation and Youth Employment.

VI. Country context, achievements and prospects

West Africa Region

22. Despite uncertainties and challenges, Governments and people in the region remain generally open to the local integration of refugees. Ethnic affinities between refugees and host populations often play a key role in this acceptance. Refugees' ability to integrate in the long term will, however, depend on the economic development of the region and country specificities which must be considered.

Sierra Leone

Context

23. After ten years of civil war, the country is on the road to sustainable peace and development. Two free and fair elections have been organized. As of 1 January 2008, there were 8,738 Liberian refugees, comprising 4,084 urban and 4,654 residing in 8 camps. They have good relations with the local authorities and populations with whom they have strong ethnic affinities. Many have been involved in small scale agricultural activities around the camps. A new refugee law has recently been enacted, ensuring the right of refugees to integrate.

Achievements

24. Since 2007, key activities implemented include an intention survey on all refugees opting for local integration. The absorption capacity of 150 communities within 15 miles radius of the camps, where refugees can locally integrate, has been measured and documented. A resource map of these communities has been developed. Discussions and sensitization of local authorities on integration and land acquisition for shelter constructions yielded good results. Discussions have been held with line ministries of Education, Health, Social Welfare, Agriculture, and Environment to ensure that Liberian refugees have access to the same services as Sierra Leonean citizen. UNHCR Government counterpart, the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA), has concluded a Draft Legal Document on the rights to ownership of Land by locally integrated refugees with districts and local authorities. Pilot projects initiated in late 2007 have been completed with good achievements which included installation of sanitation facilities, rehabilitation of schools, health posts, sporting grounds, provision of furniture, and environmental cleaning up of two refugee camps. However, a pilot shelter projects for vulnerable refugees, implemented by NaCSA experienced serious setbacks due to change in management following the recent national elections.

Prospects

25. It is planned that camps will be transformed into settlements where community based assistance will be provided. Existing facilities built by UNHCR and its partners are being turned over to the Government and local communities. The following assistance will be provided to urban refugees: shelter, water, sanitation, agriculture, micro-credit, life skills training, education, health, protection and legal documentation. It is anticipated that most refugees are likely to choose to become alien residents and not want to naturalize. Discussions are still taking place with the Government regarding the documentation to be provided to locally integrated refugees and if national passports will be required for that purpose. Regarding employment, a legal framework is being worked out under which locally integrating refugees will have all rights except the right to vote and being elected.

Cote d'Ivoire

Context

26. Despite the various crises affecting it since 1999, Cote d'Ivoire continues to host the second largest Liberian refugee population in the region, after Ghana. Most of the 24,147 Liberian refugees live in the Western part of the country. 342 Sierra Leonean reside mainly in Abidjan. Economically, Cote d'Ivoire leads the sub-region and continues to offer job opportunities, principally in the agricultural sector. Contrary to other countries, with the exception of some 5,000 persons, most refugees in Cote d'Ivoire have not been living in camps but with the local population, already integrated socially and culturally. The Government has expressed strong support to the Local Integration Process and has developed a plan which has been adopted by the Council of Ministers. Most refugees will likely choose to become alien residents rather than to naturalize.

Achievements

27. A strong mass information campaign has been conducted and an information bulletin developed, with the involvement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of African Integration, the Ministry of Justice, and the Liberian Embassy. Several field visits were also undertaken with US-PRM to Liberian refugees hosting area to dispel the belief that resettlement to the United States was still a possible durable solution.

Prospects

28. A former camp, Nicla, located in the Western part of the country, has been transformed into a local village called Zaglo. Activities planned or already

implemented in Zaglo include income generating activities, agriculture, education (rehabilitation of classes and provision of furniture), vocational training, water, rehabilitation/construction of infrastructures, and training and rehabilitation of the unoccupied part of Zaglo. Community assistance will also be provided in refugee hosting villages where there are a high proportion of refugees. As ECOWAS citizen, once they will have opted to locally integrate or once the cessation clause will come into effect, they will be provided with consular cards, issued by the Liberian or Sierra Leonean embassies, which will serve as residence permits. As ECOWAS citizen, they have full access to the labour market. It must be, however, noted that the political and economical crisis of the past few years have increased competition between Ivorians and foreigners.

Nigeria

Context

29. There are 5,528 Liberian and 1,606 Sierra Leonean refugees in Nigeria. Most reside in Oru Camp, located in the Southwest, near Lagos. Although social indicator such as child and maternal mortality are poor, especially in the northern part of the country, economic prospects are good. The Local Integration of 6,000 refugees, in a country of 140 million, is not perceived as a threat to national security or economic stability. The Government at all levels is committed to supporting the Local Integration of refugees.

Achievements

30. A Multipartite agreement, concluded between the Governments of Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, as well as ECOWAS and UNHCR, provides a legal framework for the Local Integration of Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees in Nigeria. A Joint project for the socio economic component of the Local Integration involving eleven UN Agencies has been developed. In November 2007, a work plan was approved during a National Stakeholders Conference held in Abuja.

Prospects

31. Refugees will be integrated within host communities. The Oru camp will be closed in June 2008. All refugees will be provided with housing and livelihood assistance for two years. UNHCR will strengthen access to community-based basic services such as health and education. Once they opt for local integration or after the cessation clause comes into effect, the Governments of Sierra Leone and Liberia will provide passports in which ECOWAS resident permits giving unrestricted access to the job market will be inserted as foreseen in the Multipartite Agreement.

Liberia

Context

32. Despite the improvement of the security situation in their country, 3,563 Sierra Leonean have opted to remain in Liberia where the security, political and economic situation has greatly improved since the end of the civil war. The Liberian Government and its population are open to local integration. From a survey, 2,433 refugees wish to integrate while 1,130 remain undecided. However, some of them may eventually opt to repatriate. Of those who opted for local integration, 81% decided to naturalize as Liberian citizens while 19% would like to become resident aliens.

Achievements

33. UNHCR and its government counterpart jointly organized a conference in February 2008 to acquaint all stakeholders with their responsibility in the local integration initiative, as well as obtaining a unanimous consensus on the way forward. The conference produced two inter-ministerial technical committees, chaired by the Deputy Commissioner of the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalisation and Superintendent of Montserrado County, to look respectively into legal affairs and the social aspects related to the exercise. A joint Government/UNHCR assessment to identify land for settlements in Montserrado County was conducted between October and November 2007. Significant land was identified and will be assigned to the first group. As a pilot project, UNHCR has embarked on completion of 31 former government owned houses, constructed in the 70s, and is planning to move 15 refugee families by April 2008. The other 16 houses will be allocated to needy Liberian nationals.

34. Between 27 March and 4 April 2008, 2,167 Sierra Leonean refugees in 867 families completed the Resident Permit Application Forms with the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization. The Liberian National Police simultaneously conducted finger printing of all refugees, including children, as part of the police clearance requirement. UNHCR will forward the completed Resident Permits Application forms to the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization for processing.

Prospects

35. The programme will relocate refugees from the three camps near the capital city, Monrovia, where they have been residing since the early nineties. The government has allocated land and houses will be built for each family. To promote harmonious co-existence between the receiving communities and the former refugees, the most needy in host communities will also receive assistance. Besides individual livelihoods assistance, community-based projects will improve access to health care, water, sanitation and education in areas where refugees will be locally integrated. The government of Liberia has requested that passports be issued by the government of Sierra Leone for

residence permits to be established for refugees who have opted for local integration. The granting of residence permits will provide full access to the labour market.

Ghana

Context

36. With 26,967 refugees, Ghana hosts the largest remaining Liberian refugee population in the West African Sub-Region. There are also 426 Sierra Leonean refugees living in the country. After having welcomed Liberian refugees for many years, with the improvement of the situation in their country, and the end of the organized repatriation operation, the Government of Ghana has increasingly been stressing that it does not have the resources to integrate over 20,000 urban refugees.

37. In April 2008, the Government of Ghana toughened its stance, in response to a series of high profile disruptive demonstrations, organized by Liberian refugees who demanded the resuming of large scale resettlement to third countries. These actions, in addition to delaying the implementation of self reliance projects, were deemed to contravene with Ghana's public order law, bringing the arrest and deportations of 13 Liberian refugees. The Government has reiterated its intention to invoke the cessation clause for Liberian refugees, pursuant to Art 4 (e) the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. Though Ghana grants refugees the right to work, under its 1992 domestic legislation, employment access to the formal sector is limited for all foreigners. Immigration laws are also highly regulatory and protective of the national labour market. Nevertheless, there are income generating prospects in the informal labour market including self employment, small scale trade, and high quality para-professional vocational training possibilities and tertiary level. Ghana has functional and viable national public and private health insurance schemes to which refugees may have access to. However, as with secondary or tertiary education, health services tend to be more costly for foreigners than for nationals. The authorities have shown willingness to facilitate access to citizenship and permanent residency to any willing refugee who has parental or matrimonial ties to Ghanaian nationals.

Achievements

38. Coordination systems are led by the Central Regional Administration to ensure refugee assistance is effectively mainstreamed into the national programme agenda. In this regard, necessary interventions relating to capacity building and effective mechanisms of intervention are regularly reviewed. Commitments have been received from the National Health Insurance Schemes to enroll refugees.

39. A joint UNIDO-FAO initiative, under the UN Human Security Trust Fund has been initiated to improve the human security of the refugees and their hosts by strengthening the self reliance prospects of refugees who opt to remain in Ghana. In this regard, the UNIDO has developed a number of small business management modules, based on their Rural Enterprise Development projects, which will be used to support refugees and their host communities to market their skills and businesses.

40. Strong collaboration with the Ghana AIDS Commission and the National AIDS control programme has brought a keen interest to develop HIV intervention for refugees. A 2007 survey was conducted to assess the HIV/AIDs response mechanisms in the Buduburam camp. Its recommendations are accepted by the UN HIV thematic group and shared with government institutions to inform an HIV action plan and intervention among the refugees and their host community.

Prospects

41. UNHCR will continue to facilitate the Voluntary Repatriation of Liberians and Sierra Leone Refugees, to provide assistance to extreme vulnerable refugees, to promote the right of residence under the COWAS protocols, and, in cooperation with the government, to identify other sites given the planned closure of the Budumburam camp. UNHCR will continue to promote the right of residence and establishment under the relevant ECOWAS protocols which Ghana is a signatory of for refugees who will opt to locally integrate or who after the declaration of the cessation clause will not have returned to their country.

Guinea

Context

42. The past few years have seen Guinea experiencing a severe political and governance crisis, leading to a collapse of several socio-economic indicators and causing social unrests. The country has, however, in the past provided asylum to the highest number of refugees from Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone and Liberia in the region. Some 12,800 Liberian and 2,000 Sierra Leonean registered refugees remain in Guinea at the end of large scale organized repatriation operations. Most of them live in the Forest Region bordering Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Cote d'Ivoire. Guinean government supports the Local Integration of Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees.

Achievements

43. Sensitization campaigns and workshops on local integration have been carried out for the local authorities, the refugee population, and the host

communities in each of the 7 prefectures of the Forest Region. A local integration package has also been developed. It includes construction material, nutrition kit, and assistance in income generation activities for those opting for local integration out of the camps. A profiling of the refugee population and the registration of refugees opting for Local Integration (in the areas of their choice out of the camp) has also been carried out. Of the 9,000 refugees residing in the camps, about 1000 have registered for Local Integration. A pilot transfer of 10 families comprising 29 individuals to locations outside the camp has taken place. Besides UNHCR, the families received WFP food assistance and UNICEF school kits. Furthermore, socio-communal infrastructure such as schools, universities, roads, health facilities, and local administration premises have been rehabilitated, expanded or built. UN agencies have developed a joint program for the development of the Forest Region. Refugees will be among the beneficiaries of this programme.

Prospects

44. Existing camps are being transformed into villages and settlements. Refugees integrating locally or those who will not have opted to return to their country of origin at the time of invocation of the cessation clause will be provided with individual and community-based assistance to help them achieve self reliance. The focus will be placed on enhancing access to basic services and supporting the government's presence in the region. Residence permits will be provided by the Government. A Refugee legislation for local integration has been developed, soon to be adopted by the National Assembly. Naturalization has also been offered by the government.

Gambia

Context

45. The Gambia has 795 Liberian and 6,465 Sierra-Leonean refugees, many of which had been living in the country before the civil conflict erupted in their country and therefore became "refugee sur place". There are no camps and refugees live with the local population, mainly in urban areas. Despite the political changes that have occurred in Sierra Leone and the assistance provided for voluntarily repatriation in 2004 and 2005, only 400 refugees returned home. The Gambian government welcomes the Local Integration Initiative and seeks to sustain the refugees' legal residence in the Gambia through a 'Bilateral Framework Agreement' with UNHCR. Refugees also have the option of naturalization.

Achievements

46. The Gambian Head of State waived the requirement for Sierra Leonean to

hold an aliens card, a positive development towards the Local integration plans. The UNHCR Office in Banjul completed the database of the Sierra Leonean and Liberian refugees with basic bio-data after a re-verification exercise. Since November 2007, UNHCR FO has also initiated sensitization activities for refugees on local integration, voluntary repatriation, and the upcoming cessation clause for Sierra Leonean.

Prospects

47. Refugees opting to locally integrate and those who, by the time the cessation clause comes into effect will not opt for voluntarily repatriation, will be provided with passports and residence permits. Although it is not required that passports are issued by the Sierra Leonean and Liberian authorities for residence entitlements of ECOWAS citizen in the Gambia, it is seen as an important guarantee to ensure their freedom of movement and to secure their right to return to their country of nationality.

VII. Strategy and planned activities at country level

Refugees' attainment of Rights

48. As observed, the preferred option for integrating refugees is always naturalization. Citizenship confers the highest order of rights, protections, and unambiguously brings about an end to refugee status. While UNHCR will assist Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees entitled through marriage or long-term residency or otherwise to naturalize, only the governments of Liberia and Guinea have made across-the-board offers to naturalize the Sierra Leonean and Liberian refugees respectively in their territories. Nevertheless, many refugees appear reluctant to embrace naturalization since, in most cases, it means giving up the citizenship of their country of origin.

49. The focus of the Local Integration initiative will thus be on securing multi-year residence permits with a right to work, pursuant to the provisions of the ECOWAS protocols, to refugees willing to locally integrate or refugees who by the time the cessation will come to effect will have not opted to repatriate. The project will cover costs related to the issuance of national passports or other agreed upon form of travel document, and residence permit fees for up to six years. ECOWAS Commission visits to the countries concerned to inform Governments and individuals of the obligations deriving from the ECOWAS protocol will be conducted.

50. Lawmakers will be encouraged to facilitate the passing of refugee legislations such as Sierra Leone's which allows local integration as a solution for refugees and the Guinean National Assembly's which sets out mechanisms for realizing local integration through access to permanent residence and land.

UNHCR will work with ECOWAS to promote effective implementation and harmonization of the provisions of the relevant protocols in domestic legislation.

51. In some regions, such as the Forest part of Guinea, where it is anticipated that a large number of refugees will locally integrate, support to the Government will focus on capacity building in the rehabilitation of law enforcement facilities, training and equipment for the judiciary and police and Human Rights monitoring. Likewise, there will be emphasis to combat xenophobia, focussing on women who traditionally have been disproportionately affected by xenophobic attitudes. In situations where refugees can be exposed to trafficking, preventive measures, especially for children and adolescents, will be put in place, in cooperation with the UNODC. Based on the actual needs of the communities, a range of specific, tailored activities are foreseen to emphasize the benefits refugees bring to the communities into which they are integrating.

Key partners: ECOWAS, UNICEF, UNDP, United Nations Missions, UNODC, UNFPA, UN Human Rights Commission, UNIFEM, IOM, ILO, NGOs and other bilateral actors.

Media and information

52. An important component of refugees' attainment of rights will be an information campaign, targeting the authorities and the public about the rights and obligations of the locally integrated refugees and the importance of peaceful co-habitation. Refugees will be informed about procedures and attainment of rights under the new legal framework. Activities implemented are radio messages and other community sensitization mechanisms.

Key Partners: UNHCR, National Associations of Journalists, National Broadcasting Networks, National Associations of Lawyers, Government, West African Women Association, NGOs and other bilateral actors.

Community Development

53. Key to the success of the local integration project will be its ability to strengthen public infrastructure in host communities to enable them to absorb refugees without over-stretching their resources. Local authorities and communities at all levels have started in 2007 to determine which specific community infrastructure will need to be strengthened (water, electricity, public buildings etc...). Assessing the availability of public services will also take into account that populations do not hesitate, if necessary, to cross borders in search of better services such as health care. Attention will be given to areas where access to public services by local populations is limited. It has been noted that in the Forest Region of Guinea access to basic services was better in the camps than in the local villages. The western part of Cote d'Ivoire also has a lower level of services as compared to other parts of the country.

Key partners: UNICEF, WHO, UNDP, WFP, UNHCR, Government, NGOs and other bilateral actors.

Enhancing Economic Livelihoods through Employment/Self-Employment

54. Despite the challenging socio-economic environment, many refugees have made great strides towards local integration, notably those in Côte d'Ivoire. They will, however, require assistance to integrate sustainably and legally. For refugees residing in camps, support will focus on income generating activities in their respective professional/crafts categories, e.g. carpentry, masonry, hair dressing, tailoring, metal works, computer training, trading. This will be reinforced through technical managerial training, such as accountancy, stocks handling, and management of micro productive activities, and complemented with start-up capital, micro-credits schemes negotiated with local financial institutions, and coaching on gaining access to the job market. Difficulties faced by specific groups such as women and youth in accessing credit will also be given due consideration.

Key partners: ILO, UNFPA, UNDP, WFP, UNIDO, UNHCR, UNIFEM, Rural banking sector, Government, NGOs and other bilateral actors.

Enhancing Economic Livelihoods through Agriculture

55. Based on the refugees' profile, focus will be placed on agricultural projects. Securing durable access to land is one of the challenges that will require negotiations with local authorities. Besides tools and seeds, the support provided will also ensure that refugees possess marketing and managerial skills for commercial activities and strengthened food security via food processing capabilities and accessibility to rural financing schemes..

Key partners: UNDP, UNEP, WFP, FAO, ILO, IFAD, UNHCR, UNIFEM, Rural credit banks, Bio-farming initiatives, Government, NGOs and other bilateral actors.

Education and Vocational Training

56. Ensuring access to primary, secondary, and vocational education will be one of the main vehicles for sustainable local integration. Support to tertiary education will be on a case-by-case basis. Given that host government can be overburdened with local integration activities, support will include construction and rehabilitation of existing school structures (or in some cases the handing

over of camp facilities, such as schools to the government), construction of additional classrooms, the provision of school equipment, supplies, and teachers' compensation. In cases where community-based assistance cannot be envisaged, individual assistance will be provided for periods of time varying from two to four years, depending on circumstances. All assistance will, however, be provided within the countries national education plans and policies to ensure sustainability and full integration of former refugees.

57. Courses for refugees to learn local languages, which are a prerequisite for naturalization in a number of countries such as Ghana, will also be provided. French language courses will also be made available to refugees in Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire.

58. On vocational training, besides traditional trades such as carpentry, masonry, hair dressing, and tailoring, using the findings from recent studies, other marketable skills in agriculture, metal works, trading, computer training, and mining will be provided. Where there are insufficient facilities, vocational training centres will be established in close cooperation with long term partners.

Key partners: UNDP, UNICEF, UNESCO, ILO, FAO, UNHCR, Government, NGOs and other bilateral actors.

Health

59. Refugees living in camps have benefited free health care assistance or highly subsidized services. They will now use existing fee-based government or private health services which will have to be mapped. Until refugees reach acceptable levels of self sufficiency, mechanisms will be put in place to provide the assistance they require.

60. UNHCR-supported health facilities will gradually be handed over to the government. During this period, the facility will continue to receive drugs until the government essential drug program can take over. Staff will be ensured of payment after registration with the Ministry of Health when payroll modifications have not yet materialized and staff remains without salary in this period. Possible training needs among staff are assessed, including managerial, so that a minimum standard of service provision can be achieved when UNHCR discontinues support completely.

61. Support to health facilities receiving considerable numbers of locally integrated refugees shall be considered when situated in an isolated and remote area and where expansion of the National Health Service has not yet occurred.

62. During repatriation, it became evident that some refugees benefiting from ARV treatment run the risk of no longer receiving it upon return. Also, in some

areas, treatment was provided within the refugee framework which came to an end in 2007. The roll out of national programs to isolated areas in line with national planning requirements will be encouraged as well as the creation of innovative referral systems for services not available in isolated areas.

63. Refugees trained as Community Health Workers, Sexual Gender Based Violence agents or Peer Educators will be provided with support to continue their activities. This "service to the community" in terms of using knowledge obtained during their stay in refugee camps will contribute to facilitating integration and appreciation of the community versus their new neighbors.

64. In Ghana, the government has, since 2006, introduced a pilot National Health Insurance Scheme. Discussion will be held with the authority to enable refugees to be enrolled in it.

Key partners: UNICEF, UNFPA, WHO, WFP, UNHCR, Government, National Red Cross Societies, CARITAS, NGOs and other bilateral actors.

Housing

65. In urban areas, where possible, advantage will be taken of existing housing schemes in close cooperation with governments. In cases where such option will not be available, individual support could be provided through loans. In rural areas construction packages will be distributed to enable refugees to build shelters. Where possible, refugees will be transferred away from camps and be integrated into existing communities. Transportation costs to places of local integration will be covered by the project.

66. For social housing schemes, priority will be given to vulnerable groups, families with adult(s) with disability, elderly without extended family, and single headed family. Families affected by chronic illness, HIV, and disability will, to the extent possible, be located near appropriate health services, special schooling or rehabilitation centres.

Key Partners: UNHABITAT, UNDP, IOM, UNHCR, UNICEF (water and sanitation), CARITAS, Government, NGOs and other bilateral actors.

Unaccompanied Children & Populations with Special Needs

67. All activities will be implemented in consideration of the special needs of individuals. Furthermore, whenever necessary, individual assistance will be provided. However, to ensure sustainability, the project will aim at strengthening existing national programmes for unaccompanied children and other populations with special needs such as chronically sick persons, the elderly, and physically/

mentally challenged individuals. In some instances refugee families have taken care of children that were not their own. To ensure that these children do not end up abandoned by their foster families, special arrangements will be made taking into consideration (1) their separation from a family for the second time with resulting possible emotional problems, (2) the preference for children to be placed in families with the same cultural and linguistic background and (3) the prevention of placements in institutions.

68. Individual assistance will also be given to vulnerable families but, to the extent possible, efforts will be made to support rather host communities. Where cases of forced labor of Liberian child refugees have been identified specific activities will be implemented to prevent and address the issue.

Key Partners: WFP, UNICEF, ILO, IOM, UNHCR, Government, CARITAS, National Societies of the Red Cross, ICRC, NGOs and other bilateral actors.

Environment & Conservation

69. The influx of refugees and the long-term existence of camps have adversely affected the environment. Refugees, along with local populations, have been involved in inappropriate practices of burning ground surfaces for agricultural work, tree cutting for land preparation, traditional hunting, as well as the persistent practice of charcoal making. Activities will therefore include decommissioning the camps, cleaning up and rehabilitating sites. Furthermore, reforestation around refugee camps will be carried out as well as comprehensive campaigns about the challenges of the regional environment due to deforestation, seasonal fires, and systematic destruction of the fauna and misuse of vegetal and animal resources.

70. New ways of producing goods, various forms of bio-industry, and adapted agriculture will be encouraged, taking advantage of resources available internationally and the likely willingness of locally integrated refugees to adopt such practices.

Key Partners: UNDP, UNEP, UNHCR, Government, NGOs and other bilateral actors.

VIII. Cross border and regional activities

71. The overall goal of the initiative is to ensure that Liberian and Sierra Leonean opting to locally integrate or remaining in asylum countries after the cessation clause comes into force will be able to live in harmony with the host communities and gain the acceptance of the respective Governments. This initiative will undoubtedly contribute to global peace and security in the region.

For that purpose and to reinforce shared responsibility among the Mano River Union + Côte d'Ivoire, in addition to the activities implemented at country level, some specific cross border projects will be implemented in the areas of 1) HIV/AIDS, 2) Peace and Reconciliation, 3) Youth Employment. The geographical focus of cross border programmes will be Liberia's Nimba, Lofa counties, in Sierra Leone's Kailahun, Guinee's Forest Region, and Cote d'Ivoire's Guiglo Prefecture.

HIV/AIDS

72. Given the relatively low HIV/AIDS prevalence in the region, the focus will be on scaling up prevention and awareness programmes, along the border and in isolated areas with concentrations of People of Concern to UNHCR in Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone. Special target groups are youths migrating voluntarily between urban centres in the MRU, people (especially the under-aged) forcibly moved to work in exploitative conditions, and people trafficked for unrelated reasons. These high-risk groups are usually neglected by the national health services.

73. Areas of intervention will be 1) the elaboration of prevention programs for these vulnerable groups including specially designed and targeted Information Education Communication (IEC) materials, 2) special HIV and STI services for marginalised migrants who shy away from existing health services and increased standardisation of treatment protocols in the MRU. The focus will be to improve regional coordination and additional resources will not be necessary under the present programme.

Key Partners: UNAIDS, UNHCR, UNFPA, Government, NGOs and other bilateral actors.

Prevention, Peace and reconciliation

74. Community development activities will be implemented to enhance cohesion within and between cross border communities where former refugees will be integrated, facilitating a smooth transition from refugees to residents. The scheme will work with existing networks, such as the Makona River Union, a sub regional association of Kissis from Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, and traditional alliances between ethnic groups across the border (Manos of Guinea and Liberia). The project will consolidate and enhance these networks and alliances, creating cross-border dialogues and using traditional and religious leaders, youth groups, women groups as entry points through the medium of cross border community encounters, peace festivals, radio programming, dramas and participatory theatre at community level, and sport tournaments.

75. Peace education is where UNHCR will contribute its expertise developed over the years in refugee and returnee programmes. The aim is to include

peace education in the school curriculum in countries where it is not yet the case. Materials developed in Liberia will be shared with all offices in the region for that purpose.

Key Partners: UNOWA, ECOWAS, UNDP, MRU Secretariat, UNHCR, Government, NGOs and other bilateral actors

Youth Employment

76. The vibrant trading activities by the youth along the borders will be supported through connecting existing cooperatives on both sides of the borders. The various studies on youth employment, carried out by the UN, governments or other development actors, will be used to develop activities based on the actual needs of the youth. ILO will be requested to provide a consultant to profile skills in all countries hosting Sierra Leonean and Liberian refugees as was done in Liberia. Offices in Liberia (Nimba, Lofa counties), Sierra Leone (Kailahun), Guinea (Nzerekore), and Cote d'Ivoire (Guiglo Prefecture) will identify youth groups involved in cross-border economic activities and the areas where they could be supported. Resources for that purpose have been budgeted in each country concerned under "enhancing economic livelihoods through employment and through livelihoods"

Key Partners: ILO, UNDP, UNHCR, UNFPA, UNICEF, FAO, Government, NGOs and other bilateral actors

IX Implementation modalities of the strategy and coordination structures

77. The initiative will be field driven. Each country will be expected to set up a coordination structure, comprising of the Government, UNHCR, and all participating organizations including the ECOWAS Focal point, to monitor and review the implementation of the project. UNHCR will strengthen staff at the field level. The UNHCR Office in Abuja will continue to cooperate with the ECOWAS Commission to facilitate the integration of refugees in the region. UNHCR Local Integration Country Focal Points will meet on a quarterly basis to coordinate regional action.

78. Funding received by UNHCR will be disbursed through implementing arrangements. Activities funded directly will be governed by the rules and regulations of the contributing and receiving organizations. Key to the success of the initiative will be the role played by central and local Governments. In each country, the agency in charge of refugee affairs will be adequately equipped to play its role of interface and coordination.

X. Expected constraints

79. The main constraint will be the lack of acceptance of the locally integrated refugees by the host populations and Governments. It may lead to acts of discrimination. The poor economic situation will likely hamper efforts towards self sufficiency. The lack of willingness from refugees who see the asylum institution, once the conflict has subsided, as an answer to poverty and lack of economic opportunities is also a major constraint to achieving local integration through enhancing self reliance. Ongoing resettlement activities have also provided some refugees with the impression that there was an alternative to repatriation or local integration. Finally, local integration will be competing with dreams of migration (often irregular) to the Western World.

XI. Resource requirements

80. The attached budget presents the financial requirements to make the initiative a success. While some resources will be available, as part of UNHCR annual budgets, additional resources will have to be sought.

XII. Partnerships

81. As mentioned, a number of United Nations institutions have been or will be approached to take part at country level. Some institutions (ILO, UNV Bonn) have also expressed willingness to be active in the process. NGO partners, in particular, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), will play a central role in the implementation of Local Integration programmes.

XIII. Monitoring and reporting

82. To ensure rapid responses to refugees' integration problems, there will be regular monitoring missions to the integrating areas. Progress made will be reported on a monthly, quarterly and annual basis. The Government counterparts will play a central role in the monitoring of the process.