



Refugee livelihoods

Livelihood strategies and
options for Congolese refugees
in Gabon.

*A case study for possible local
integration*

Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit

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Executive summary

Until mid-1999, Gabon remained one of the few countries on the African continent to not have experienced a significant influx of refugees. That all changed in just a few months starting in June of the same year, with the arrival of tens of thousands of people fleeing a spreading civil conflict in the neighbouring Republic of Congo (RoC). On arrival in Gabon, most refugees initially settled within or adjacent to existing villages in rural areas, some of whom have remained there since their arrival. Others have since moved to urban and peri-urban settings. Little assistance was, however, provided by UNHCR or other agencies so the refugee caseload was, in large, self-settled.

Repatriation has been slow and timid despite the signing of a tripartite agreement in Libreville in July 2001 and subsequent moves to assist voluntary repatriation, with actual numbers returning being far less than originally anticipated. There is, therefore, a need for the international community to clearly address this situation – now entering its fifth year of existence – which, as this Case Study shows, faces a number of problems, mainly relating to identity, security and the lack of any real prospect for securing livelihoods for those refugees who may have no option but to remain in Gabon.

One of the main purposes of this study was to examine what moves have been taken by UNHCR, the government and other actors to encourage and enable refugees to develop their livelihood options and security while residing in Gabon. At the same time, observations were made on possible openings where more attention might be given to encourage and enable this to happen, as well as to make corrective actions if situations were found where refugee livelihoods were not receiving adequate attention and/or support.

The notion of local integration, of which livelihood security is an inherent component, remains one of the most positive options for RoC refugees currently in Gabon, as other possibilities – resettlement and repatriation – seem increasingly unlikely. The current livelihood situation of most refugees would appear to be held in delicate balance, however, as they receive little or no assistance and employment opportunities are extremely limited and even then seem to be reserved for local people. The current malaise regarding protection and security adds further to the concerns expressed by refugees from the RoC. Current or future activities or perceptions that perpetuate the distinction between refugees and local Gabonese will only undermine any possibility of formalised local integration

While some signs have been made by the Government of Gabon to elaborate and implement a local integration policy and programme, no practical steps have yet been taken. The government, however, would not and should not be alone in this as support for such an initiative must also come from the international community. This should be respected even in a country like Gabon which, on paper, might appear to have sufficient internal assets to at least fund the requirements and actions needed for local integration to become a reality. Without such support, it is clear that the government will not take the necessary steps towards improving the welfare of these refugees. If, in contrast, their situation can be accommodated as an integral part of specific national or, perhaps more appropriate, provincial development plans for local community benefit also, there is some chance that this would be favourably received by central government. A serious new look is therefore

required for this situation as refugees seem likely to have to stay in Gabon for some time to come.

Limited micro-credit support has been extended to a relatively small number of refugees since this initiative started. The value of this, however, is seriously questioned: with very few exceptions, it does not seem to have contributed to the longer term security of any of those refugees met during surveys carried out in preparing this Case Study. It also does little to engender co-operation with local communities.

The only other sustained assistance to a broad representation of the refugee community has been agricultural support, which is likewise unable to demonstrate a significant benefit in terms of livelihood security, except in a few scattered instances.

Any move towards local integration will have to recognise that while some few similarities can be identified between the three main refugee hosting areas, it would be impractical and inappropriate to develop a single response to the current Congolese caseload as there are vital differences which underlie the circumstances in which these people live in each of the three main refugee-hosting areas. Any thought of a local integration programme must address these differences and retain enough flexibility to allow for these to be resolved in an appropriate manner.

Five suggested steps are proposed for action.

Step 1. Prepare a working definition of what “local integration” means and might mean in the present context. Clarity and transparency are essential at this stage to avoid later misunderstandings.

Step 2. Commission a “Draft Plan of Action for Local Integration in Gabon”, which would address the following issues: protection; social and economic studies of needs and opportunities; existing and potentially needed institutional arrangements; how local integration fits with relevant or planned development initiatives; needs assessments of refugees and local communities/individuals in the affected areas; and likely funding and other resource needs and opportunities.

Step 3. Raise awareness of this draft Plan at all levels to inform and allow others to provide input.

Step 4. Conclude this phase by transforming this Plan into a framework of implementation, outlining specific needs and responsibilities – from communities to ministries and donors – with a clear timeframe. This would then become the basic working document for subsequent discussions, meetings, and consensus building prior to common agreement being reached – or not – on the way forward.

Step 5. Depending on the outcome of the above point, revise or reconsider available options. If strong indications of support emerge for local integration then consideration might be given to some of the broader and generic stages outlined in the DLI initiative referred to above. In a decision to abandon future consideration of local integration for this caseload, then some alternative solutions will need to be introduced to address some if not all of the concerns identified through this study.

Introduction

General overview

1. The Gabonese Republic borders the Atlantic Ocean at the Equator, between the Republic of the Congo and Equatorial Guinea. Its longest international boundary (1,903km) is shared with the former. With an area of 257,667 km², Gabon is slightly smaller than the US state of Colorado.
2. The country is divided into a few distinct zones – a narrow coastal plain backed by a hilly, heavily forested interior, and broad savannah with additional woodlands in the east and south. With the exception of key urban centres like Libreville, the capital city, it is in the savannah region where most refugees have settled.
3. Until oil was discovered offshore in the early 1970s, Gabon depended on timber and manganese as the main sources of revenue. The country has, however, been found to host many other natural riches, especially in terms of petroleum, uranium, gold, iron ore, hydropower and diamonds. These, along with the country's great forest resources, have been and continue to be heavily exploited, forming the substance of much of the country's wealth. The oil sector now accounts for 50 per cent of the country's GDP, but Gabon continues to face fluctuating prices for its oil, timber and manganese exports.
4. The country also has a wealth of agricultural and fishery resources, but these have been largely neglected and are therefore underdeveloped. Most of the population relies on subsistence farming, although complications such as tsetse fly make farming difficult in some areas. Actual land use is minimal: just over one per cent of the country is arable with only about 0.6 per cent of this under crops. Some 60 per cent of the labour force (estimated at around 600,000 people) are engaged in agriculture-related activities, while another 25 per cent work in various service activities and the remaining 15 per cent in the limited industry developed thus far in the country.
5. These facts, combined with a population estimated at around 1.3 million people and a growth rate of just 2.5 per cent, have helped Gabon become one of Africa's wealthier countries – on paper at least. Gabon enjoys a per capita income four times that of most nations of sub-Saharan Africa. While this has supported a sharp decline in extreme poverty – there is now no official poverty line – because of the high degree of income inequality, a very large proportion of the population actually remains poor.
6. Despite the abundance of natural wealth, and the potential for using this in a way that would greatly boost longer term security and development, poor fiscal management hobbles the economy. Within the past few years, however, the government seems at last to be taking some steps to improve this situation and has implemented various structural reforms. The most significant of these have been the

adoption of new labour and forestry codes which have contributed to prudent fiscal management. Improvements in governance and the civil service have also been made.

7. Since it gained independence from France in 1960, Gabon has been one of the few African countries where political stability is well consolidated, sharp contrast from most of its neighbouring countries many of which have suffered civil war over the past few centuries. Gabon also exerts a stabilising influence in a volatile sub-region and has frequently played an important role in mediating conflicts with neighbouring countries.

8. Gabon had, thus, relatively little experience with refugee influxes prior to the arrival of refugees from the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville) in 1999, to the extent that there was not even a state authority with experience in dealing with refugee affairs. The National Commission for Refugees (Commission Nationale pour les Réfugiés - CNR) has, however, since been established but lacks resources, capacity (at the time this study was undertaken it had, for example, no physical representation outside Libreville), and institutional recognition within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of which it is part. It is wholly supported by UNHCR.

The refugee influx

9. Until mid-1999, Gabon remained one of the few countries on the African continent not to have experienced a significant influx of refugees. That all changed in a few months starting in June 1999 with the arrival of thousands of people fleeing the spreading civil conflict in neighbouring Republic of Congo (RoC).

10. The RoC actually experienced three civil wars in the 1990s - 1993, 1997 and again in 1999. While the two first outbreaks focused primarily on Brazzaville, the country's capital city, the third had ramifications that reached far into the hinterland, touching the border of Gabon and other neighbouring countries. This sparked off considerable internal population displacement: it is thought that 15,000 people may have died in the three conflicts with as many as 500,000 people being made homeless.

11. Refugees fleeing the most recent outbreak of war undertook considerable journeys to reach safety in Gabon: some are thought to have travelled more than 1,000km - often through difficult and hostile terrain - to reach safety. On arrival in Gabon, most refugees initially settled within or adjacent to existing villages in rural areas, some of whom have remained there since their arrival. Others have since moved to urban and peri-urban settings. Little assistance was, however, provided by UNHCR or other agencies so the refugee caseload was, for the most part, self-settled.

12. First signs of the conflict abating in the RoC were seen in December 1999 with the signing of a ceasefire agreement between the army and militant leaders. Proposals for a new constitution and electoral process in March 2001 gave further hope of a return to peace and a possible return home for those in exile. Since then, however, repatriation has been slow and timid, despite the signing of a tripartite agreement in Libreville in July 2001 and subsequent moves to assist voluntary repatriation. This, however, has not gone as smoothly as anticipated with actual numbers being far fewer than originally anticipated. Anticipated figures for 2004, some 3,000 individuals, will not make much of an impression on the overall caseload

and, if recent indications are anything to go by, such anticipated numbers may not even be reached. There is, therefore, a need for the international community to clearly address this situation – now entering its fifth year of existence – which, as this case study shows, faces a number of problems, mainly relating to identity, security and the lack of any real prospect for securing livelihoods for those refugees who may have no option but to remain in Gabon.

UNHCR in Gabon

UNHCR's presence and activities

13. The primary aim of UNHCR's presence in Gabon is to assist and protect Congolese and other refugees. With regard to the former caseload, in particular, UNHCR only established its Office in Libreville and two field offices in Franceville and Tchibanga in late 1999 following the influx of refugees from the RoC. Prior to this, UNHCR had maintained a small presence in Gabon, located at the time within the office of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Budget cuts threatened closure of the two field offices in 2003, despite the significant number of refugees in and around these two important provincial hubs, and despite a number of rather serious concerns, some of which are discussed in the following sections.

14. Since UNHCR's programme started in earnest in 1999, there has been a constant change of implementing partners. Handicap International was the first partner, followed by the Commission Internationale Catholique pour les Migrations (CICM) in February 2002. As CICM withdrew from implementing activities in June 2003, these were taken over by ALISEI, formerly "Nuovo Frontiera", an Italian non-governmental organisation (NGO) which became responsible for the following activities, most of which had been ongoing for a number of years:

- logistical support for repatriation;
- income-generating activities (micro-credit and micro projects);
- agricultural support, primarily the provision of technical assistance; and
- primary education. UNHCR continues to directly implement a programme on secondary education and skills training.

15. UNHCR's other implementing partner, Initiative pour une Afrique Solidaire (IAS), is responsible for assistance in the areas of health, nutrition and community services.

16. Despite efforts to identify local NGOs, no suitable partners have been found – a situation which is not only confined to the particular subject of this study but an aspect which will likely impact any future moves towards possible local integration for refugees.

17. Compared with many operations of similar size and scale, UNHCR's interventions and support to this programme in Gabon has always been quite low, as indicated in Table 1. If the recommendations emerging from this study, however, are to be considered and implemented, a significant increase in resources – personnel

and funding – is likely to be needed from a range of actors – government ministries, state authorities, community leaders, relevant UN agencies, NGOs and donors.

Table 1. Funds provided by UNHCR to refugee assistance in Gabon

Year	Amount (US\$)
1999	1,570,269
2000	2,293,524
2001	2,722,341
2002	1,874,871
2003	2,133,885 (of which 816,978 was for voluntary repatriation)
2004 (approved)	1,421,300

Source: UNHCR

18. Now, with the prospect of further diminishing resources and assistance from UNHCR, moves should be taken to ensure the protection of the residual caseload and assist them to become economically and actively self-sufficient. Much needs to happen, however, for this to become a reality as the government, together with UNHCR and donor and certain development agencies, will first have to put in place a sound legal framework and modalities under which the local integration of refugees may become a possibility and eventual reality. In principle the government has agreed to work out a policy that will encourage, and result in, local integration, but no concrete steps have yet been taken towards enabling this to happen.

19. A repatriation programme started in 2001 and continues today.

Current caseload

20. UNHCR figures at the end of 2002 show 19,136 people as being of concern, comprising 13,473 refugees and 5,663 asylum seekers from 25 different nationalities¹. The vast majority of these refugees – 11,945, some 62 per cent of the total figure – originate from the Republic of Congo. Refugees and asylum seekers have concentrated in five provinces – Estuaire, Haute-Ogooué, Ogooué-Lolo, Nianga and Ngounié – with the greatest concentration outside Libreville being in the south and south-eastern corner of the country (Table 2). Nearly 80 per cent of the refugee caseload lives in urban areas, notably Libreville, Franceville, Tchibanga, Mouilla and Ndende. Libreville alone accounts for an estimated 5,259 refugees and asylum seekers, of whom 2,415 are from RoC².

21. There are no formal refugee camps in the country, with all refugees having spontaneously settled in particular villages, or making their own housing arrangements in urban and peri-urban centres.

¹ UNHCR. 2002. Annual Statistical Report.

² Numbers at 31 December 2002. Annual Statistical Report 2002.

Table 2. Dispersion of refugees and asylum seekers in Gabon

Location	Number of refugees
Urban caseload	
Boumango	232
Libreville	5,259
Port-Gentil	245
Gamba	234
Lambaréné	44
Franceville	3,662
Moanda	3,308
Koula-Moutou	283
Tchibanga	2,136
Mouila	525
Ndendé	603
Sub-total urban caseload	16,259
Rural/dispersed caseload	
Moulengui B.C.	413
Moulengui B.F.	142
Voungou-Pont	78
Dilemba	375
Rinazala	245
Mayumba	131
Mabanda	145
Koumo Dous.	24
Nzinga	90
Banda Mamba	74
Doussala	27
Lébamba	91
Lékindou	98
Rébé	10
Mounana	244
Bakoumba	201
Ngouoni	67
Lastourville	139
Pana	16
Dienga	34
Sub-total Rural/Dispersed Caseload	2,645
TOTAL	19,136

Source: UNHCR. 2002. Annual Statistical Report.

22. As shown above, refugees and asylum seekers have settled in 10 urban and peri-urban zones, comprising an estimated population of 16,259 individuals - representing 85 per cent of the total figure in Gabon - while others live in one of the 20 rural settlements (2,645 individuals or 14 per cent of the population).

23. Some 70 per cent of the current caseload has settled in the southern provinces along Gabon's border with the Republic of Congo. In the provinces of Haut-Ogoué and Ogoué-Lolo, an estimated 6,930 refugees and asylum seekers – of whom 4,013 (58 per cent) are from the RoC – live in the urban centres of Franceville and Moanda alone.

24. Nyanga and Ngounié provinces have an estimated 5,909 refugees and asylum seekers of whom 3,264 (55 per cent) live in the urban and semi-urban centres of Tchibanga, Mouila and Ndendé. Of this urban caseload, the vast majority – 2,831 people (87 per cent) – are refugees from the RoC. Elsewhere in these two provinces, some 2,212 refugees from the RoC are settled in rural sites, accounting for 84 per cent of the total rural refugee caseload.

25. As the Congolese and Gabonese have quite similar ethnic backgrounds, and as there had already been considerable cross border interactions – mainly through trade and some inter-marriage – between the two nations, the Congolese refugees did not encounter great difficulties in settling within or around existing villages and urban areas. The case of Dilemba village in Nyanga Province illustrates this point: at the peak of the arrival of refugees in 1999, this village of just 75 Gabonese people hosted some 1,200 refugees – a ratio of one Gabon national to sixteen refugees. Today, more than 300 refugees remain in the village and engage in many common activities with local people. In most rural locations at least, as in Dilemba where a new school was recently built for refugee and local children, local communities today share and benefit from health infrastructures, schools and water boreholes with refugees. Locals were even seen to copy some of the traditional agricultural practices and techniques favoured by the Congolese.

Refugee status

26. Refugees are obliged to carry identity documents on their person at all times. Currently refugees are in possession of an attestation or certificate indicating that they have been granted refugee status. Not all arms of the government services, however, respect these identification documents and refugees are subject to constant harassment at barriers and check points as they travel as well as in public places (see also Part II for direct feedback on this issue from refugees). Similar reactions emerge from some parts of civil society as well as prospective employers, leading to a widespread feeling of xenophobia among refugees – rural and urban dwellers.

27. UNHCR has reacted to this predicament by printing a refugee identity card. After much waiting and delay, release of this document was expected in September 2003 but, at the time this study was carried out, it was still awaiting government approval: the government it seems requires that the insignia of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, the Interior and Immigration adorn the document³.

28. Another pressing issue relates to the seeming need for refugees to possess a residence permit (Carte de Séjour) – issued free of charge to those who go through individual status determination. This can apparently also be purchased – the cost varying according to the country of origin of the applicant – or refugees can apply for

³ In May 2004, the authors were informed that the government has given the green light to the issuance of identification documents for refugees through the enactment of a bylaw

citizenship, although this is a long and onerous process. Citizenship can also be acquired if certain conditions are met, although many refugees (as well as agencies and authorities) seem unaware of the requirements that might allow them to pursue this further.

29. Given the seeming attention that UNHCR and certain government authorities are giving to the possibility of local integration as a durable solution to at least some of this caseload's plight, it would seem prudent that more information is obtained on these issues and options, as a priority. Such matters then need to be clearly explained to the refugee caseload, as this is one area of tremendous concern at present, and likely to underpin any future moves towards local integration. Similar awareness raising needs to be carried out for the armed forces, provincial authorities and general public, as a minimum.

Refugee livelihood situation and options

Background

30. One of the main purposes of this study was to examine what moves have been taken by UNHCR, the government and other actors to encourage and enable refugees to develop their livelihood security while residing in Gabon. At the same time, observations were made on possible openings where more attention might be given to encourage and enable this to happen, as well as to make corrective actions if situations were found where refugee livelihoods were not receiving adequate attention and/or support.

31. A number of observations relating to this central theme are made throughout this report. Before discussing these further, however, it is useful to consider a few pertinent aspects of the situation(s) in which refugees now live, for example, the possibility, or not, of returning to their homes, as well as future aspirations of the refugees, the local community and Government of Gabon.

The possibility of return...?

32. While the promotion of voluntary repatriation is one of the major objectives of UNHCR, and notwithstanding the efforts made thus far, moves towards voluntary repatriation from Gabon to the RoC have not been very successful and have not resulted in a significant reduction of the number of refugees. In 2002, UNHCR launched a voluntary repatriation scheme under which it was hoped that some 6,000 Congolese refugees would have returned to their country by the end of 2003. Between January and June 2003, however, only 600 refugees registered with UNHCR of whom 507 were repatriated, while by the end of the year the figure had risen to a total of 1,028 for the full 12-month period.

33. Logistical arrangements are one reason hindering return as cross-border infrastructure prevents convoys from travelling by road. Refugees must instead be flown to Pointe Noire and Brazzaville and subsequently transported by road to their final destination - a time-consuming and costly undertaking, as well as being perhaps unnecessarily complicated. Another reason for the modest interest in voluntarily repatriating could be the past and current lack of re-integration and rehabilitation programmes for repatriates in the Republic of Congo and the continuing unsettled situation in parts of the country, especially in the Pool region. It is therefore assumed - and certainly the sentiment expressed by the majority of persons interviewed - that the vast majority of the current Congolese caseload will remain on Gabon's soil well beyond 2005.

34. Mention of returning to the RoC was minimal during discussions held in this study period, although it is known that at least some refugees continue to retain direct contact with their former homes. The majority of refugees see resettlement as the solution to their plight and this was raised in almost every meeting held as well

as in direct interviews with selected members of the refugee communities. While the likelihood of any major resettlement programme remains distant, and considering the seemingly diminishing level of UNHCR assistance, the residual caseload will have to be prepared to become economically self-sufficient. It is therefore an appropriate moment to review opportunities and needs for a potential local integration programme.

Local integration

35. Gabon is one of the few African countries which has not been touched by civil conflict and, until the arrival of the current Congolese influx, had relatively little experience of dealing with refugees. The Chadian caseload in eastern Gabon, for example, appears to have been dealt with through local settlement without much assistance from international agencies or the government. While experience from the latter should be considered, the current caseload of Congolese refugees however is quite different in scale and will require considerable assistance if local integration is to be achieved at all levels – urban and rural.

36. The issue of local integration for Congolese refugees has been on the agenda for some time: supportive statements were again made by government at the 2003 EXCOM meeting in Geneva. Thus, while in principle the government has agreed to elaborate and implement a policy that will lead to local integration, to date no such document has been developed, nor has a process started to even draft such a policy.

37. While local integration remains as a possible durable solution to this caseload's needs, it will, however, require a great deal of support – logistical and financial – if it is ever to be realised in Gabon. Many factors currently weigh against it, or indeed any lasting solution, including:

- Gabon's inexperience of tackling refugee issues;
- refugees are issued with a certificate from the CNR which states that refugees are equally entitled to engage in economic activities as a Gabon national, but these are often not recognised by authorities, especially in the Franceville and Tchibanga regions. Thus, clear and unambiguous recognition of their status, and acceptance of this by the national population, is an essential prerequisite to any steps towards local integration;
- a chronic shortage of development agencies and NGOs – national and international – who might assist this process;
- the desperate shortage of employment opportunities – even if a refugee or national possesses certain skills, the work market is already saturated;
- current and possibly growing animosity towards refugees, primarily in urban and peri-urban settings; and
- the probable difficulty in attracting sufficient donor interest in supporting a programme of local integration, given Gabon's apparent wealth.

38. Conditions in Gabon are therefore not entirely favourable for such a programme to be launched without much background research and preparation. Additional actions will be required in some regions/villages as the situation is far from uniform. This, however, only adds further to the complication as any move towards achieving lasting local integration will need to have a considerable amount of flexibility to adapt to local needs and conditions: it is, for example, far easier to envisage a programme of local integration being welcomed, adopted and implemented in the rural settlements around Tchibanga, than it is for refugees in that city itself.

39. Thus, while there is a possibility of elaborating and implementing a programme that supports local integration, this will not happen overnight nor will it happen without firm commitment from government agencies, UN agencies and the donor community.

This study

Background

40. This study forms part of a series of independent surveys commissioned by UNHCR's Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit (EPAU), intended to examine the livelihood security and prospects of refugees in a range of countries. It was carried out with the purpose of:

- examining the coping strategies adopted by refugees in Gabon; and
- determining the extent to which the past and current situation, as well as the response mechanism(s) put in place by UNHCR, government and other possible organisations, have contributed to the security and well-being of this caseload.

41. Particular consideration was given to the following:

- the extent to which UNHCR and other actors have supported refugee livelihood strategies;
- identifying gaps in the existing assistance programme;
- examining future prospects and making firm proposals for the ways in which UNHCR and others can introduce new strategies in support of refugee livelihoods; and
- recommending measures that can be applied to support refugees without UNHCR field presence, in particular the options and needs required for local integration to happen.

Procedures and analysis of findings

Approaches used

42. The study was based on an initial series of situation briefings with UNHCR (HQ Geneva, Branch Office Libreville and Field Offices in Franceville and Tchibanga), government authorities (primarily the CNR), UNHCR's implementing partners and many discussions – direct and indirect – with refugees and local people, almost exclusively in rural and peri-urban conditions.

43. A combination of tools and approaches was used to gather pertinent data for this study. Following an initial examination of information available on the refugee situation in rural Gabon, in particular, and given the number of sites and geographical distances involved, it was decided from the outset to work from the two hubs of Franceville and Tchibanga. From there, it was then agreed to concentrate on a few selected sites where more detailed analyses could be undertaken in the time available.

44. Agreement was reached from the outset that refugee livelihoods would be primarily examined through activities relating to agriculture and/or micro-credit. These decisions were taken given that they are the two main subject areas addressed from the outset of the care and maintenance programme co-ordinated by UNHCR, the government and other agencies in an attempt to provide some livelihood support to refugees.

45. Open group formal meetings were organised with refugee groups at each of the eight sites visited. These allowed participants – mainly refugees but on occasion nationals also – to express their general concerns, although discussions were to the degree possible kept to the remit of this study – livelihood analysis. Particular attention was given to two activities supported and seen by UNHCR as its main means of intervention, agriculture and micro-credit support. Such meetings, organised in each case by the respective refugee leader for that town/village/site, varied considerably in duration, but usually lasted at least two hours. The number of participants attending such meetings also varied, from around 10 to over 100, with men, women, youth and the elderly being represented.

46. In addition to this, a large number of direct, face to face interviews were held at eight different sites. These were carried out (in French and occasionally local dialect) by interviewers recruited for this purpose, using a standard questionnaire to guide discussions and responses. Two groups of interviewers were selected – one working in Haute-Ogooué Province, the other in Nianga and Ngounié provinces – and trained to carry out the interviews using the questionnaire, which covered topics ranging from protection issues, education, health and nutrition to more general household arrangements. Almost 160 refugees participated voluntarily in this exercise, with results being drawn from 148 of these (in cases where information was incomplete the results were not considered). Individual interviews were only carried out with the interviewee's consent, with selected individuals being mainly chosen from among those participating in agriculture and/or micro-credit schemes. While the attention was to focus mainly on women participants, this was not always possible as many men, especially youths, insisted on their points of view also being recorded.

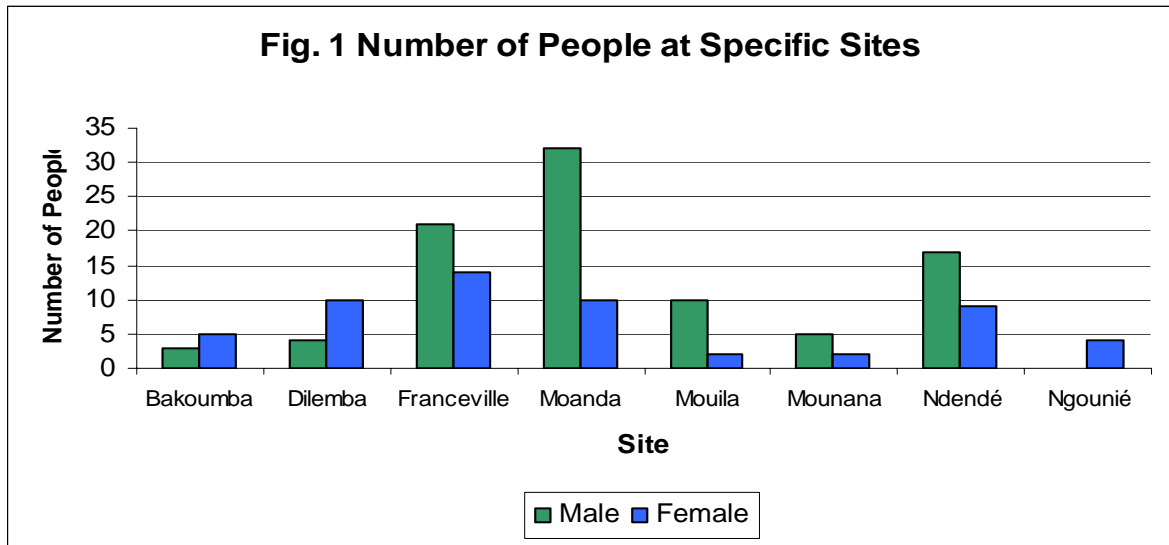
47. Field visits were also undertaken to selected sites, and discussions held with refugees benefiting from UNHCR's assistance, primarily those engaged in some form of agriculture or market gardening. Visits were also made to the premises of people who either had in the past benefited or were at the time benefiting from micro-credit support. Some workshops were also visited to discuss issues with individuals who had not been given this kind of support. Similar approaches were, where possible, applied at all sites visited around the two geographical hubs of Franceville and Tchibanga.

Analysis of approaches and findings

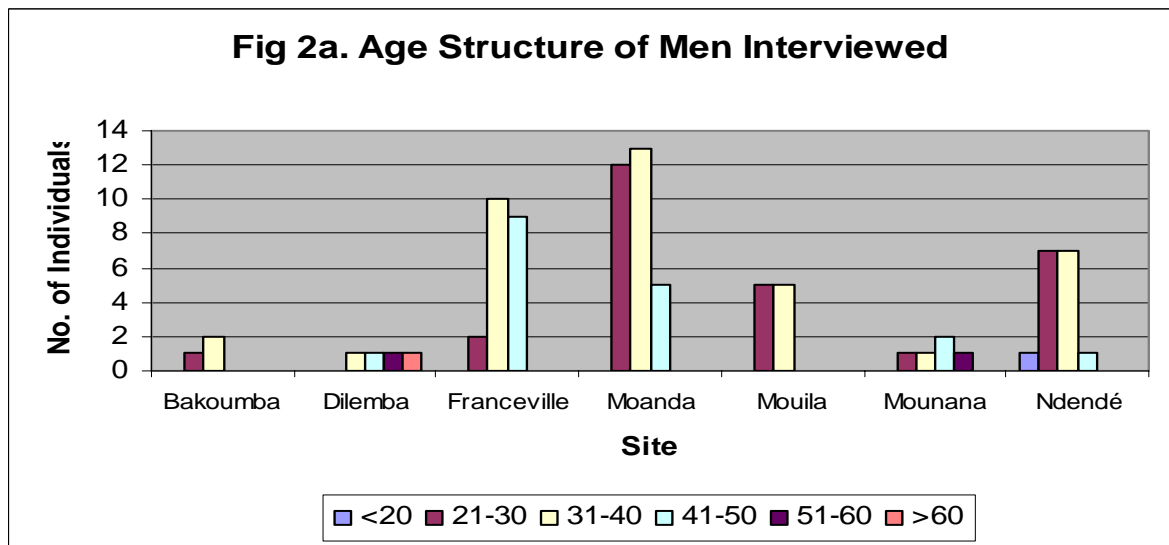
48. The different methodologies and approaches outlined above appeared to work satisfactorily in most situations; the main difficulty encountered relating to the sheer number of people – especially men – who wanted to be interviewed. Although the purpose of the interviews was made clear beforehand, people still wanted to use this opportunity to express their general concerns which most often related to two issues: protection (refugee identity cards) and resettlement. After the first such experience, however, more effort was made to select individuals – and by preference women –

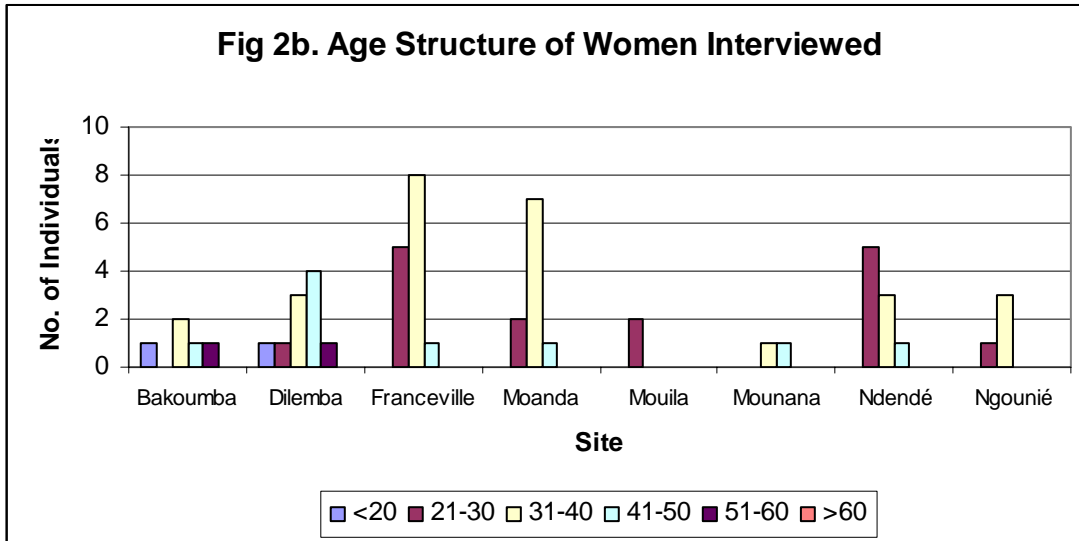
who had had direct experience in either the micro-credit or agricultural support schemes.

49. Interviews from 148 people were therefore considered in the findings of this study. This comprised observations from 92 men and 56 women, the highest ratio of male interviews being noted at the urban centres of Moanda and Mouila (Figure 1). People contacted came from a diverse array of tribes, those most commonly recorded being Lari, Bembe, Nzémbi, Kouni, Soundi, Bateke, Dzébi, Tsangui, Mpaunau, Mbatsangui, Bakouni, Bayaka, Vili, Pounou, Kamba, Kikonko, Mougala, Obamba, Wadai, Téké, Dondo, Yaka, Bayombé, Nsangu and Mbembe.

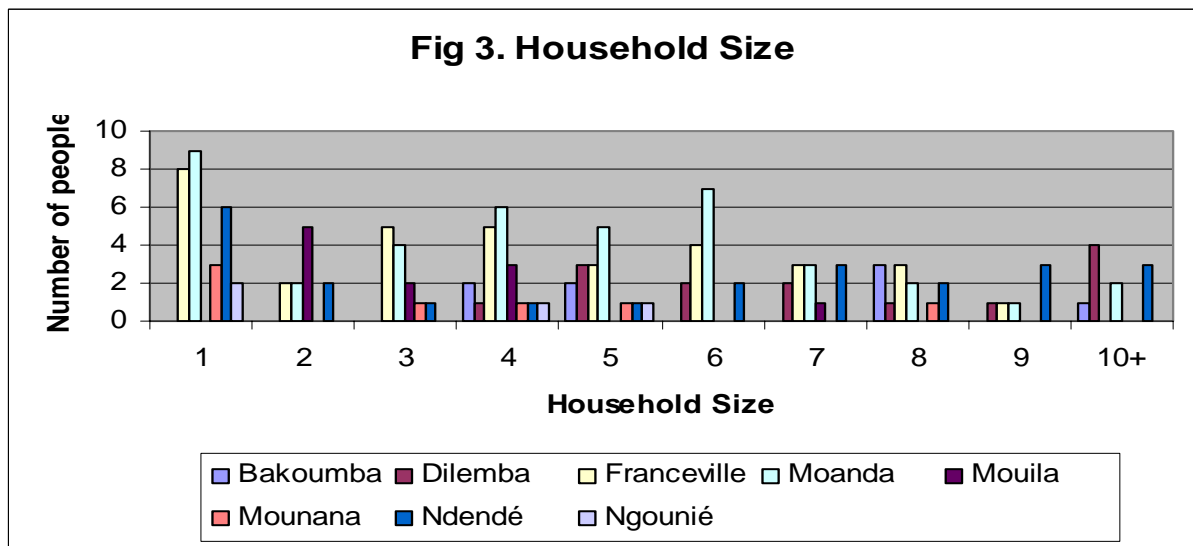


50. During the interview process, care was also taken to ensure a wide enough age range. For women, individuals from the age of 19 to 56 were interviewed, while men from the ages of 20 to 67 were among those participating in the review (Figure 2a and 2b). Average ages for the female groups would be in the late 20s and early 30s, while most men tended to be in the mid-late 30s and early 40s.

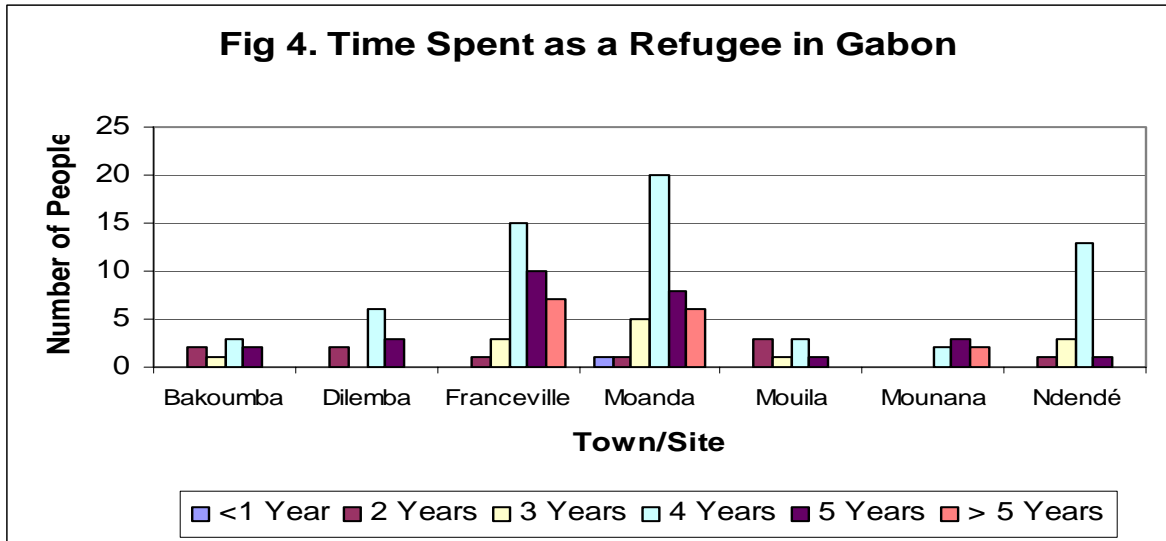




51. Attention was also given to household size (Figure 3). From the eight sites where interviews were conducted, the household composition ranged from 1 to 16 people, the former being noted in a rather large number of cases, 28 (19 per cent of all households surveyed). Of the 148 households censused, 131 cases (89 per cent) had fewer than 10 members. Most households ranged from 3 to 6 members (45 per cent of the total).



52. Most of the refugees spoken with (62 – 48 per cent) during the interviews had been in Gabon for around four years (Figure 4). Just one instance was noted of an individual having arrived less than one year prior to this study being carried out, while 15 refugees had been in the country for more than five years.



53. Thus, despite the relatively short time spent on the ground for the analyses accompanying this review, the various sampling methods used and approaches taken are believed to provide sufficient confidence in the observations and recommendations as to make them representative of this caseload - the only exception perhaps being that of urban refugees in Libreville whose situation might be quite different to those in Franceville or Tchibanga. Time pressure, unfortunately, did not allow this group to be surveyed in any detail.

54. The questionnaire used for the individual interviews appeared to work satisfactorily, with the only recurrent negative comment being the time required for completion. Each interview took approximately two hours to complete which, while limiting the number of interviews which could be carried out in the time given, could also have been a constraint on the part of some refugees, the intention being to not retain people from their own activities for undue periods of time. The latter was only experienced in a couple of instances with individuals not wishing to continue the interview on account of other engagements or, as in most instances, not having anything to contribute to the questions being posed. Any such incomplete records have not been included in this analysis.

55. Brief meetings were held each day with the team of researchers to review the previous day's work, examine some of the responses and to fine tune approaches and further explain any particular words or phrases which had proved difficult to translate or express.

Protection

General observations

56. Refugees consistently reported during both the group and individual discussions that the lack of recognition by the local authorities, police and the military of the existing refugee certificate as an official document, was one of the major difficulties they are confronted with on a daily basis. The purpose and significance of these documents issued by the Libreville-based CNR is not clear nor has it sufficiently been communicated to the local authorities and security apparatus.

57. While these documents should ensure the protection of refugees in Gabon, many people mentioned direct clashes with the local authorities and security forces over these papers. Outcomes cited included:

- confiscation of the refugee document;
- destruction of the document – ripping it apart or burning it;
- torture and/or imprisonment of the holder by security forces;
- bribery of the holder by the security forces;
- limitations to freedom of movement and access to markets; and
- on at least one occasion, the murder of a refugee by local people without a trial.

58. Although the refugee document implies the right for that individual to engage in income-generating activities in Gabon – similar in all ways to that of a national – refugees encounter considerable difficulties or are not allowed to carry out economic activities due to restrictions imposed by the local authorities and employers. One example was found of a refugee man who obtained work with a local international company, only to be told two days after starting that he no longer had work on account of his status⁴.

59. In most cases, these restrictions seem to relate to the lack of a resident permit which allows foreigners to carry out economic activities in Gabon. Such papers are most often given to economic migrants, and can be purchased. In order to obtain a resident's permit, however, refugees must revoke their refugee status and take on that of an economic migrant. Not wanting to do this – or probably in the majority of cases not being able to afford this – many refugees work illegally at whatever source of employment they can find.

⁴ Some refugees with identity cards are, however, gainfully employed. Given the high unemployment rate and limited number of opportunities, national and refugees alike find it difficult to secure employment

60. One refugee spoke of the difficulties he had encountered when working for certain companies once his refugee status was known. To overcome the problems, he entered into agreement with one of his Gabonese neighbours, and registered his business using the latter's name. To avoid any further complications he applied for a resident permit but without avail. After two attempts, when questioning why his application was not considered he was told that applications for resident permits for refugees are not even considered and are put directly aside.

61. The authorities are aware of these issues but few, if any, steps have been taken to address them. Unless addressed, however, continued difficulties must be expected, all of which will only add to any current uncertainty or resistance on the part of nationals with regard to formal integration of refugees.

62. Another discussion with a Rwandan refugee, however, illustrates that it is not impossible to maintain one's refugee status and to have a resident permit at the same time. In this instance, a Rwandan doctor left her country after the 1994 genocide and flew to Gabon where she settled, found work in a national hospital and obtained a resident permit, all while maintaining her refugee status.

63. While the issue of refugee identity status remains unresolved, another issue which should be noted is that of citizenship, which might also have a bearing on future moves towards local integration. According to the CNR, no provisions exist for refugees on legal and nationality grounds under Gabonese law. However, for at least some Congolese refugees the possibility of becoming a national citizen of Gabon exists if:

- one of his/her parents is Gabonese;
- s/he is born on Gabonese soil;
- s/he is married to a citizen of Gabon; and/or
- s/he has been living 5km from the Gabonese border, on Congolese territory.

64. Such details are not widely known among government or relevant authority circles nor by the refugees or local people. It would therefore appear timely to conduct a thorough multi agency/authority review of these restrictions and options in order for a clearer overall picture to be presented and debated.

Suggested measures to take

65. The existence/elaboration of a sound legal framework for refugees is a precondition of any discussion and elaboration of a longer term plan. It would seem timely that refugees are now fully informed about the three durable solutions UNHCR can offer on their behalf: repatriation, resettlement or local integration. The eligibility criteria, probability, consequences, and the advantages and disadvantages of each of these solutions should be clearly explained to refugees and others, especially at government and the general public levels. Clear statements should be prepared on issues such as nationalisation (for those wishing to integrate), the status and rights of children born in Gabon (of refugee and mixed marriages), and the rights of those wishing to retain refugee status. Such statements should be widely transmitted to all concerned authorities, community leaders and others to allow

refugees to make informed and realistic decisions and to inform others of the rights afforded to refugees.

66. Recognition of, and respect for a refugee's certificate is a fundamental concern which has to be addressed as a matter of priority to ensure that refugee rights are respected and that refugees are no longer harassed by local authorities and security forces. The awareness-raising campaigns already launched by UNHCR targeting local authorities, the police, military and custom forces needs to be enhanced and repeated on a continuous basis, or for as long as necessary.

67. Key to all of the above is a reinforcement of the CNR - and other relevant authorities with respect to local integration - in terms of its personnel capacity and resources, so that it becomes more visible, active, supportive and respected. Considerable advocacy work needs to be carried out by UNHCR and others to obtain full government support for this body. Apart from having an office in the capital Libreville, CNR should also open offices in Tchibanga and Franceville. At least one representative from CNR should be based in Tchibanga and Franceville to serve as an access point for refugees. Funds should be made available for a feasibility study to be carried out by the CNR to look into the social and economic absorption capacity of the refugee-hosting areas. However, caution must be practised in case the CNR and other bodies become any more dependent on external agencies including UNHCR; internal national support must instead be forthcoming.

Micro-credit programme

Background

68. Although Gabon enjoys a per capita income which is four times higher than that of most nations of sub-Saharan Africa, a large proportion of the population remains poor⁵. Wealth is not equally distributed and almost half the population lives under the poverty line⁶. Nevertheless, the international community does not see Gabon as a development country, which poses a serious problem for relief agencies such as UNHCR to partner with development actors. Such partnerships will, however, prove to be inevitable in order to establish and guarantee sustainable financial and technical services to underpin any move towards local integration.

69. A mentality of entitlement and dependency on grants and, until recently, food aid⁷, is well established in Gabon, and continues today as refugees believe that each should have access to micro-credit facilities and, in many cases, that such funds need not be refunded.

70. While the potential benefits from micro-credit assistance to refugees is recognised in general, certain conditions need to be understood, in place and respected for this to work effectively. These conditions are, as the following discussion shows, currently absent in Gabon. Much work is required to turn the current initiative around from being a drain and waste of much needed financial resources to something which could prove of lasting value and assistance towards developing more sustainable livelihoods for refugees participating in the activity.

The UNHCR micro-credit programme

71. Provision of micro-credit in support of selected activities by refugees is one of the most prominent activities in the assistance provided to refugees in Gabon by UNHCR. At the same time, however, this study found it to be quite controversial and in need of urgent change.

72. The micro-credit scheme started in 2000 with Handicap International, and the roots of one of the main problems facing this initiative today can be traced back to this time. Handicap International provided funds to selected refugees in two ways: first as a form of micro-credit which was to be re-imbursed, and another initiative which provided the equivalent of a once-off grant in which no repayment was expected.

73. The CICM took over this programme from February 2003 until June 2003. During this time, emphasis was placed on two projects – micro-credit and women's co-operatives – both designed to allow refugees to be financially responsible for their

⁵ The World Factbook, <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/gb.html>, 20 October 2003.

⁶ Country Analysis Brief, <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/gabon.html>, updated October 2003.

⁷ WFP ceased its food distribution programme in April 2003.

own lives and to provide for their families. With regard to the micro-credit scheme, refugees were required to re-imburse the full amounts provided to them, while participants in the women's co-operatives were to have set aside 20 per cent of their earnings to purchase cloth and sewing supplies for the co-operative. The modalities of this programme are outlined in Box 1.

74. Terms of re-imbursement were a one-month grace period, followed by a 20 per cent repayment each month for a period of five months.

75. During this 18-month period, 309 such loans were provided to a total amount of FCFA 53,437,356. Activities supported included sculpture, establishment of artisan studios, preparation and sale of manioc, and small livestock raising, primarily pigs, sheep and chickens. As some, if not all of these loans were to have had a multiplier effect in terms of people benefiting, the expected number of beneficiaries to have gained from this initiative was around 1,500.

76. As might be expected, there was high demand for micro-credit assistance, but the respective commissions were either unable to fund all such demands or judged some to be inappropriate for this support, either on account of the candidates themselves or the nature of the proposed activities (Table 3).

Box 1. Micro-credit modality

Refugees with small enterprise ideas were encouraged to approach one of CICM's offices, to complete applications and undergo interviews. Project proposals were assessed individually, evaluated and presented to a micro-credit commission which deliberated and decided upon each loan application. Project viability, the potential for loan repayment and refugee vulnerability were the criteria used by the specially formed Commissions - comprising two representatives from CICM and one each from UNHCR and IAS - to finance projects. The Commission also decided on the loan amount and terms of disbursement. The site of each successful project was to have been visited and any technical assistance judged needed provided.

Table 3. Number of micro-credit loans requested and approved

Location	Number of demands evaluated*	Total no. of loans approved
Estuaire	608	136
Haut Ogooué	657	108
Nyanga/ Ngounié	202	65
TOTAL	1,467	309

* Far more requests were made than evaluated: the Tchibanga Commission, for example, received 2,156 loan applications but evaluated only 202 of these.

77. An awareness-raising campaign was also run during this period to impress upon those benefiting from such loans that repayments were a fundamental part of this initiative. Nevertheless, at the end of the 18-month programme, only about 15 per cent of the initial loans made available were recovered (Table 4).

Table 4. Reimbursement rates of micro-credit programmes

Location	No. of recipients		Total no of beneficiaries	Total funds (FCFA)	Reimbursement level
	Male	female			
Estuaire	43	93	506	25,472,250	3,405,000 (13%)
Haut Ogooué	33	75	403	17,101,073	3,472,100 (20%)
Nyanga/ Ngounié	28	37	603	11,864,033	1,069,560 (9%)
Total	104	205	1,512	53,437,356	7,946,660 (15%)

Source: Summary report of CICM's activities in Gabon, 20 June 2003

78. Implementation of the micro-credit activity was handed over to a new partner, ALISEI, in July 2003, with funding being extended to an additional 106 pending dossiers, amounting to CFA 29,141,700. Projects were supported at the following amounts: CFA 12,115,000 in Libreville, CFA 11,232,500 in Franceville and CFA 5,794,200 in Tchibanga.

79. ALISEI has since introduced criteria for obtaining and granting micro-credits. To be eligible for obtaining a micro-credit one needed to:

- be a recognised refugee (prima facie or under the mandate of UNHCR);
- be older than 18 years;
- not have applied for a UNHCR scholarship;
- present a viable and lucrative project;
- not have benefited, or be benefiting, from a loan which was not yet fully reimbursed; and
- not be guilty of aggression vis-à-vis UNHCR or its partners.

80. Micro-credit was only granted if the above mentioned eligibility criteria were met and when the applicant had not lived in Gabon for more than five years, was not inserted in the professional plan and was not on the repatriation list for that year. No micro-credit support was granted for the sale of alcoholic drinks.

81. As with the former Micro-Credit Commissions of the CICM, a "Commission d'attribution et de financement des micro-credits", composed of UNHCR, ALISEI, IAS and CNR was created to decide on the attribution and the amount that might be approved - which was not to exceed a maximum of FCFA250,000. Micro-credit was to be re-imbursed within five months after a grace period of one month. In case the loan was not re-imbursed, UNHCR and/or its implementing partner would grant no supplementary financial assistance. Any materials bought through this scheme remained the property of the implementing partner until the last payment had been made.

82. At the time this survey was carried out, ALISEI was about to organise a training session for good financial management of the projects.

83. The number of requests received for micro-credit continues to grow, but the quality of the requests remains very low. In some cases, it is apparent that this micro-credit initiative represents an easy way for people to divert money received for productive activities to more immediate support needs, commonly to pay for rent and medical services and/or to repay debts they have already incurred.

84. By July 2003, 117 micro-credit initiatives were being supported to a total amount of FCFA 18,872,085. This was attributed to 73 women and 46 men, intended to support a wide array of activities ranging from a bakery to hairdressing, construction, fisheries, breeding livestock, opening a restaurant, food processing and the sale of food and non-food products. The re-imburement rate was almost 20 per cent.

85. During a focus group discussion with four men and three women who had either benefited from or were currently receiving benefits from micro-credit assistance, the following remarks were made on some of the main difficulties they encounter:

- visits of tax officers (from the Ministry of Commerce or to collect municipal taxes) to pay real and “imaginary” taxes;
- no granting of residence permit;
- no possibility of opening a bank or savings account since they don’t possess a residence permit;
- high competition and saturation of the market for certain products;
- fluctuations in the market dynamics (periods of good business and periods of calm);
- difficulties with accessing stock or dealing with disruptions in the delivery of products coming from the capital city; and
- the short delay for the first re-imburement – one month after receiving the loan.

86. Some of the main reasons cited by people as to why their business attempts failed were the following:

- long absence and the wrong choice of a business partner, as illustrated by a hairdresser who found that his young Gabonese business partner had sold all his materials and furniture when he came back after a three-month period of absence;
- lack of potential markets and failure to respond to changing market dynamics;
- bad financial management – one woman received micro-credit to sell smoked sardines from her home, but is unable to re-imbure the loan as her clients in turn buy the food on credit and “forget” to pay their debt at the end of the month; and
- poor conceptualisation of the initial project. This can be illustrated by a male refugee who wanted to start a trade in honey and tobacco leaves. Because the travel to and from the border with Congo – where he bought his stock – became

to expensive, he decided to change his activity to poaching and the illegal sale of wildlife to repay his debts.

87. When asked how the micro-credit scheme could be improved, the following suggestions were made:

- more time should be given between receiving the credit and first re-imburement;
- the amount of money per project should be increased;
- the former system of receiving credit in several tranches should not be reintroduced (as was the case before ALISEI, which now disburses the full amount in one instance); and
- the Commission should not reduce the original amount asked for because this stimulates re-orientation of the original activity as funds are not sufficient

88. Many advantages can be attributed to micro-credit support for refugees including more stable production and expansion of the activities that can be undertaken, improved working and living conditions and quality of life. Several refugees commented on how the profits made from their credit-assisted activities now enabled them to pay school fees for their children and provide them with the limited materials they needed for classes.

89. It is clear, however, that a far more targeted and rigorous structure is needed, especially to ensure that far higher levels of return are forthcoming on all loans. Levels of re-imburement vary considerably - the highest to date being at 80 per cent in Moulengui-Binza, a rural site close to the Congo border, as shown below in Table 5. The general pattern of re-imburements, however, is very low.

Table 5. Levels of micro-credit re-imburement at rural sites around Tchibanga, as noted under the CICM-directed programme

Site	Level of reimbursement (%)
Moulengui-Binza	80
Nzinga	33
Mouila*	16
Ndende*	12
Tchibanga*	10
Dilemba	8
Banda-Mamba	8
Mabanda	1
Mayumba	0

* urban or peri urban site

90. It is difficult to see what benefit this initiative has brought to the whole programme and it certainly, in its current form, is not contributing as intended to the longer term livelihood security of refugees. There is clearly a poor understanding among the vast majority of refugees - those who have previously or are currently benefiting from micro-credit, as well as those who wish to be included in the programme - of what micro-credit is and how it might benefit them. The legacy of

“money for all, for free” is widespread, but is causing much dissent among the refugee population.

91. Apart from saving facilities, training and business evaluation are missing components in the existing micro-credit scheme as well as the development of trust and business relationships and networks between refugees to launch joint initiatives.

92. As outlined above under criteria for obtaining and granting of micro-credits, ALISEI has recently taken important first steps to try and become more rigorous in its selection of projects and recipients, as well as in follow-up. It is still, however, too early to judge whether this will prove effective as the first tranche of reimbursements of the ALISEI monitored programme were only expected to be repaid at the time this study was carried out.

93. Average re-imbusement levels are only around 10 per cent for the entire micro-credit programme. This means that instead of having a revolving fund, UNHCR is required to inject new funds to this initiative each year, and will likely have to continue to do so. This is clearly not sustainable and will become less likely to happen, given the current financial situation facing the organisation.

Suggested measures to take

Success factors

94. There are certain, minimal conditions⁸ for successfully introducing micro-credit assistance to situations such as this, which should be taken into account. These are:

- stability and security;
- a cash economy;
- a demand for financial services; and
- sufficient economic activities.

95. All but one of these conditions – sufficient economic activities – is currently in place in Gabon. Another important success factor is the proximity/access to centres of economic activity, a condition which does not seem to be valid for many of the refugee sites in Gabon.

96. In order to make micro-credit programmes manageable and to minimise the risk of low reimbursement, small loans with relatively short loan maturation time and frequent payments should be kept in mind.

97. Another much under-estimated factor is the development of trust relationships to stimulate community ownership and involvement before issuing loans. The Congolese refugee community in Gabon seems to be very individualistic and doesn't seem to have trust in setting up joint-businesses or co-operatives.

⁸ UNHCR/ILO training manual on “Introduction to Micro-finance in Conflict-affected Communities”.

98. A successful programme also depends on the availability of labour-intensive economic opportunities and refugees' willingness to engage in these opportunities. The most straightforward labour-intensive economic activity for refugees in the Franceville and Tchibanga areas is agriculture. It is possible for refugees in Gabon to have access to agricultural land. Some local governments and private individuals have given free access, or access against a reasonable cost, to certain agriculture plots, allowing refugees to engage in market gardening and plantations, but very often the willingness to become engaged in labour-intensive agricultural activities is missing.

99. Apart from these basic conditions, the success of a micro-credit programme greatly depends on good monitoring and management by an organization with proven skills and expertise in micro-finance schemes. A thorough market study should be undertaken to check the feasibility of the project and diversification of projects and sectors should be stimulated to avoid over-exploitation of certain activities and sectors. There is also a clear need for vigilance, for example, not giving micro-credit to those refugees who are about to be repatriated and making sure that outstanding credit is actually re-imbursed before repatriation. More rigid screening of requests and the individual's situation are also advisable, as is basic training on how to financially and commercially manage the credit.

Specific recommendations

100. In view of the above observations which clearly show that this micro-credit system is not working, and given that the level of funds available for micro-credit activities in 2004 is going to be further reduced (revised figures for Gabon are US\$20,000), two scenarios are elaborated below with accompanying recommendations.

101. **Scenario I.** The preferred and strongly recommended option is to end the current programme of micro-credit. This should be replaced by a series of demonstration projects focused primarily on joint agricultural production by refugees and local people, in the case of Franceville and Tchibanga regions. Such projects would have the following elements:

- agricultural support and crop diversification, taking care that market gardening activities around Franceville and Tchibanga towns, for example, would not jeopardise crop production in the more outlying sites;
- support would be available to local Gabonese as well as refugees working on the same site;
- commercial trading and marketing assistance to help the producers get their produce onto the market place;
- education – from schools (including school gardens), to markets, to restaurants and hotels;
- small-scale livestock rearing complementary to agricultural production; and
- management training, including accounting and planning.

102. Micro-credit support envisaged for such activities could be in the form of a water pump, materials, breeding livestock, or direct assistance with transportation. Such funds would be re-imbursed following sale of produce. Emphasis would be placed on good management, and technical assistance would be provided by the implementing partner. Every effort should be made from the outset to ensure that the best conditions are available for what are in effect demonstration projects – good soil, water, good seeds, credible and hardworking individuals – for them to have the best possible chance of succeeding. If this can be achieved, the intention – which should be openly made clear from the outset – should be that similar initiatives would be replicated elsewhere as a model for local integration via agricultural production.⁹

103. It is recommended that at least 75 per cent of the budgets allocated for both Franceville and Tchibanga (approx. FCFA 7,000,000 for each region) be designated to these projects, the remainder of which may be used to support quality-assured informal activities such as carpentry and building (skills which are in demand), and small-scale food processing (e.g. manioc preparation) and expansion of these activities to produce other sought-after products, like manioc tapioca and flour.

104. Such a change of direction would require a thorough awareness-raising campaign in order to succeed, as well as careful selection of candidates, and strong technical assistance and support. The current partner, ALISEI, is well-equipped to take on this role – more so even than managing the current assemblage of random activities which it oversees.

105. Micro-credit assistance in Libreville will probably have to continue to address individual needs but this should be accompanied by the recommended steps outlined below in Scenario 2. At the same time, emphasis should be placed on supporting skills development, market analyses and income-generating activities, linking individuals if possible to other already established work programmes of companies or NGOs. Nonetheless, UNHCR must expect a low rate of return – both in actual financial re-imburements and practical achievements and any degree of sustainability in these activities, at least in the short-term, pending the availability of additional opportunities on the labour market.

106. **Scenario 2.** This option is a “business as usual” approach in which low returns (financial and practical) must be assumed, as well as the continued need for UNHCR to inject additional fresh funds each year. It is not seen as sustainable, even in the short-term. Nonetheless, adoption of the following recommendations should help enhance rigour in the selection of micro-credit projects and candidates, as well as in management and monitoring:

- elaborate, and respect, a series of essential baseline conditions which must be met by all recipients of funds. This should be accompanied by a series of meetings with those provisionally selected for funding, to discuss their projects in more detail, to visit their home/site of intended work, and to discuss in detail the level of re-imburement;

⁹ The Direction de la Province Agricole in Tchibanga has recently offered a site of 10 hectares to refugees for agricultural purposes. Located close to the town, this would form an excellent test site: the inclusion of local people in this initiative would bring increased appreciation by local authorities.

- provide training for ALISEI in micro-credit management;
- undertake awareness-raising among all refugee communities to explain the nature and purpose of micro-credit;
- seek a guarantee for each project, ideally from the president of the refugee committee: if payments are not made, s/he should then be held responsible;
- provide management training for all recipients of funds;
- reduce the average level of funding per activity to CFA100,000-150,000 for basic activities (cake making, manioc processing, etc) and split the disbursement of larger sums into two or three payments, each being dependent on satisfactory reimbursements;
- allow some flexibility in the repayment rates, given the nature of the activities;
- emphasis should be given to supporting projects that address agricultural development and extension (including marketing) through micro-credit support. This will need to be accompanied by appropriate awareness-raising campaigns on crops and vegetables, targeting schools, markets, restaurants and the general public; and
- ensure continuous follow-up and monitoring of all funded activities.

Agriculture

Background

107. The possibility of agriculture becoming a major contributing factor in improving the welfare and livelihood security of refugees – and local people – cannot be overlooked. The rural areas of southern and eastern Gabon, where refugees are currently settled, have fertile soils and a climate conducive to a broad agricultural base. That these have not thus far been used for agriculture is not an indication that these regions are not suitable for agriculture, but rather that the local Gabonese do not have a strong tradition of farming, combined with a low and sparsely distributed rural population.

108. Attention needs, however, to be drawn to a number of issues if agricultural production is to make a significant and stable contribution to refugee, and local people's, welfare. Among these are:

- clarification of land use rights;
- crop diversification;
- sustainable practices introduced and adopted;
- improved access to distant markets, including improved roads and reliable transportation when produce is ready;
- training in marketing and commercial interests, including the possible development of local co-operatives;
- training in the transformation of agricultural (and other natural resource products) goods into finished products which would fetch higher market prices;
- training in land management practices so that despite a seemingly endless surface of natural habitat, environmental degradation is prevented or at least contained.

Current practices

109. UNHCR's implementing partner ALISEI provides technical assistance in the form of technical advice, training in sustainable agriculture and use of pesticides as well as the provision of tool and seed kits for gardening and plantations.

110. Agricultural production to date has focused on two separate activities – the provision of technical assistance to refugees working in plantations (mainly bananas and manioc) and those engaged in market gardening. Unlike many refugee-hosting countries or regions, land availability per se is not a major issue in Gabon and refugees are generally able to reach simple agreements (which do not necessarily

require funding) with local people. While instances of uncertainty regarding land tenure and access rights emerged in discussions with refugees, benefits are generally seen from both sides, which in itself is an excellent starting point for local integration.

111. From discussions with refugees, local people and authorities, it is clear that agriculture could serve as a foundation for local integration in at least some – possibly the majority – of the refugee sites. In some sites, such as Rina-Nzala and Dilemba (Tchibanga region) and Bakoumba (Franceville region) this is already obvious. Refugees work alongside local people. The local population of Dilemba (75 people) was itself swamped by the arrival of some 1,200 refugees in the late 1990s: today, the remaining several hundred refugees have settled perfectly into the village. Local people have even adopted the refugees' way of planting manioc, which has increased their production of this crop by a factor of three.

112. There is, however, a major problem with agricultural production in these outlying sites: transportation to markets. Currently refugees (and local people) at sites such as Bakoumba, Rina-Nzala and Dilemba depend on commercial buyers coming to these remote villages to purchase and remove their produce. If transportation does not arrive – the road infrastructure is seriously awful even in the dry season – then the crops decay and are left to rot along the roadside. Large quantities of bananas, especially, are lost each year in this way, representing a huge financial loss for these people. Villagers from Dilemba estimated that more than 40 tonnes of bananas had been lost by the failure of one lorry to arrive.

Suggested measures to take

113. Agricultural development has considerable benefits to offer refugees in Gabon, and could prove to be an essential instrument in contributing to local integration. It is important, however, that this activity sector is developed carefully and not allowed to proceed unchecked and unaided. Should this happen, valuable marketing opportunities will surely be lost as people will grow mostly the same crops, will saturate already limited markets and subsequently risk financial losses – even in the short-term.

114. One aspect of the agricultural programme which should not be overlooked is its potential to stabilise population movements in the Franceville and Tchibanga regions in particular. If agricultural production can be enhanced – through the measures outlined above – a higher level of subsistence and financial security can be assumed for these regions, leading to improved living conditions and greater stability. In addition to preventing further emigration from these sites to Libreville, in particular, such conditions might even serve to reverse the trend and draw some refugees with agricultural experience back to these regions, lessening pressure on already strained conditions in the capital city.

Livelihood security analysis, and prospects for local integration

Introduction

115. The notion of local integration, of which livelihood security is an inherent component, remains one of the most positive options for RoC refugees currently in Gabon, as other possibilities – resettlement and repatriation – seem increasingly unlikely. The current livelihood situation of most refugees would appear to be held in a delicate balance, however, as they receive little or no assistance and employment opportunities, at least those which are above board, are extremely limited and even then seem to be mainly reserved for local people. The current malaise regarding protection and security adds further to the concerns expressed by refugees from the RoC. Current or future activities or perceptions that perpetuate the distinction between refugees and local Gabonese will only undermine the possibility of local integration

116. But what are the prospects of local integration taking place and, equally, what are some of the conditions that would be required? While some signs have been made by the Government of Gabon to elaborate and implement a local integration policy and programme, no practical steps have yet been taken. The government, however, would not and should not be alone in this as support for such an initiative should come from the international community. This should be respected even in a country like Gabon which, on paper, would suggest it has possibly sufficient internal assets to at least fund the requirements and actions needed for local integration to become a reality. Without such support, it is abundantly clear that no move will be taken by the government towards improving the welfare of these refugees. If, in contrast, their situation can be accommodated as an integral part of specific national or, perhaps more appropriate, provincial development plans for local community benefit also, there is some chance that this would be favourably received by central government.

117. The current situation is further hindered by the fact that there is an uncomfortably low level of information and experience available with local integration programmes for refugees in general. If the circumstances were different, it might have allowed government members as well as other actors including the refugee community to weigh up the situation and assess the options open to them. The considerable uncertainty surrounding local integration – at all levels, including within UNHCR, the lead agency encouraging this initiative – must therefore be addressed if this option is to be taken further.

Refugee livelihood security and coping mechanisms

118. It is probably fair to say that following the initial crisis and influx in 1999, minimal assistance has been provided to the RoC refugee caseload in Gabon. Food aid was cut in April 2003 and continuing assistance in terms of micro-credit and

agricultural support is limited to a small proportion of the caseload. Virtually every person interviewed in this study reported that the single most common purchase was food, and most of their earnings went on this commodity. Most refugees also reported eating just one meal a day.

119. Key to the survival of these people – and possibly this was recognised by UNHCR, government and others – has largely been the fact that these are self-settled refugees. Had formal camps been established, the situation today would be far more serious, and would most likely have required far greater input of funds and resources than has been the case. As it is, virtually none of those interviewed in the course of this study identified a positive aspect of their current situation. Instead, a number of negative elements were exposed, mainly:

- loss of dignity;
- the behaviour of nationals, most often described by individuals as xenophobia and racism;
- marginalisation of refugees especially by authorities;
- difficulty of survival in this environment;
- loss of valuables;
- lack of work and even when they succeed in finding work, they often don't get paid for it; and
- cost of living – no assistance with housing especially.

120. Limited micro-credit support has been extended to 1,696 refugees since this initiative started in 2002. The value of this, however, is seriously questioned: with a very few exceptions, it does not seem to have contributed to the longer term security of any of those refugees met during this survey. It also does little to engender co-operation with local communities. Many reasons underlie this, among the most important being:

- insufficient funds being made available to allow individuals to engage in identified activities that could really become profitable;
- poorly managed programmes;
- insufficient rigour in the system resulting in minimal re-imburement rates; and
- programmes which tend to exclude local people from involvement.

121. Apart from this, the only other sustained assistance to a broad representation of the refugee community has been some agricultural support, which is likewise unable to demonstrate a significant benefit in terms of livelihood security, except in a few scattered instances.

122. Examples exist of how micro-credit can be beneficial as a livelihood intervention, given certain conditions and conditional on a range of rules being applied and respected. Of interest in this respect in Gabon should be how even a

small (either financially or in terms of the number of participants) micro-credit programme might be used to enhance the livelihood security of a small but increasing number of people, combating poverty and dependency to some degree, enabling them perhaps to engage in activities with local communities as a means towards encouraging local integration, while restoring some dignity to those same refugees.

123. What is actually seen to happen, however, is that refugees (men and women) are obliged to pursue a wide range of activities and openings in order to earn a living. Self-employment was one of the most commonly seen survival options for refugees, with individuals – again, men and women – supporting themselves and their families through providing specific services or by selling diverse goods in the informal sector. The serious lack of work opportunities certainly prevents trained individuals from practising their former skills but the few openings also limit these and other people from improving the quality of their lives.

124. As a means of coping with these conditions, most refugees engage in a number of activities, the most common being small gardening and commercial activities, primarily buying, selling and/or transforming small amounts of food items and hardware or clothing materials. More skilled work practised relates to barbers and hairdressing, clothes making, operating a small restaurant or similar, some of which have benefited from micro-credit support. When asked how they coped with the current situation, the most common responses were having to reduce their expenditure on, and thus intake of, food, trying to find several different sources of work, and making loan arrangements with others – other refugees and local people.

Towards local integration

The current situation

125. Before looking at some possible considerations and modalities to elaborate a programme for local integration, it should be noted that a set of similar difficulties are evident at all three refugee-hosting zones – Libreville, Franceville and Tchibanga. These can be summarised as follows:

- refugees are, in general, reluctant to return home. Most would opt for resettlement if the possibility arose, failing which their understanding of what local integration might involve would be a definite second best;
- the local job market is already saturated. The lack of active enterprises in Gabon poses a serious problem for both manual labourers and skilled operators to find work, and there is already stiff competition with nationals;
- the Commissioner for Refugees is still a relatively new entity which does not seem to have much internal government support, relies entirely on UNHCR for assistance, and has no field presence. It is therefore not in a strong position to help refugees or, equally important, to lead or influence internal government debate regarding a possible programme of local integration;

- there is a weak market for agricultural produce and – without immediate diversification – overproduction of a few basic (but widely grown) crops will quickly swamp the market, leading to disappointment and financial loss;
- an increasing risk of in-migration to all urban centres from rural areas cannot be ignored, but could possibly be reversed;
- refugees are not sure to whom they might turn to for assistance – a situation further aggravated by the lack of and frequent changes of NGOs or development agencies, in general, and the many changes to UNHCR’s implementing partners over the past few years; and
- a general lack of willingness among this caseload to collaborate with one another, or with local people which, while perhaps being understandable, will limit opportunities for community or co-operative development.

126. Some additional restrictions relate directly to the economy, in particular, barriers in terms of lack of access to financial assistance and, of course, to the perception and actions of a least a minority of Gabonese towards these refugees from the RoC.

127. Thus, while a number of general similarities can be identified, it would be impractical and inappropriate to develop a single response to the current Congolese caseload as there are vital differences which underlie the circumstances in which these people live in each of the three main refugee-hosting areas. There are, for example, stark contrasts in the actual situations and needs between remote, rural sites like Dilemba and Tchibanga town. Any thought of a local integration programme must address these differences and retain enough flexibility to allow for these to be resolved in an appropriate manner.

Development through Local Integration

128. The “Development through Local Integration” (DLI) concept elaborated by UNHCR¹⁰ is “based on the understanding that those refugees, who are unable to repatriate and are willing to integrate locally, will find a solution to their plight in their country of asylum”. The DLI initiative is an option, not an obligation, of refugee-hosting countries and envisions broad-based partnerships between governments, humanitarian and bi- and multi-lateral development agencies. Key components of the DLI (UNHCR, 2003) are:

- economic – refugees become progressively less reliant on state aid or humanitarian assistance, and local integration is facilitated by refugees becoming self-reliant since they become better able to interact with the local population economically and socially. According to the DLI Framework, “Economically integrated refugees contribute to the economic development of the host country rather than merely constituting a “burden”;
- social and cultural – “interactions between refugees and local communities enable refugees to live amongst or alongside the host population, without

¹⁰ Framework for Durable Solutions for Refugees and Persons of Concern. UNHCR Geneva. May 2003.

discrimination or exploitation and as contributors to the development of their host communities"; and

- legal - "refugees are granted a progressively wider range of rights and entitlements by the host state which are commensurate, generally, with those enjoyed by local citizens. These include freedom of movement, access to education and labour markets... and the capacity to travel with valid travel and identity documents.... Over time, the process should lead to permanent residence rights and perhaps ultimately the acquisition of citizenship in the country of asylum".

129. Consideration of these three broad components against the observations noted earlier in this report immediately exposes a series of challenges to any move towards local integration and begins to shed some light on the absolute scale of what such an undertaking would entail and require.

130. The UNHCR DLI framework goes on to outline eight stages, namely:

- agreement of the government and local authorities to local integration;
- consensus building and engaging development and humanitarian actors, including donors;
- gathering operational information;
- integrated programming approach ;
- developing a joint implementation strategy;
- mobilising resources for DLI;
- bringing refugees on the development agenda; and
- developing legal and institutional frameworks that foster local integration.

131. What is needed most of all, however, to create a favourable environment for discussions to take place is to urgently inform people of what might be involved in this approach, even before the "agreement of the government and local authorities to local integration" is actually considered.

132. In the current situation, this is certainly an issue which needs to be resolved as although the prospects of a programme of local integration is being increasingly spoken about, knowledge about what might be required to even kick start considerations is lacking, and discussions seem to be taking place among a minority of people.

Conclusions and proposed next steps

133. Based on observations and discussions with refugees, local people, authorities and institutions responsible for the safety and welfare of the current refugee caseload, local integration would appear as an appropriate – if not the most appropriate – durable solution for this caseload at this point in time. Just how this will take shape, however, remains uncertain.

134. A programme of local integration will not happen overnight in Gabon and many if not all of the preconditions for local integration to take place have yet to be considered and elaborated, let alone put in place.

135. The starting point remains the need to clarify understanding of what would likely be involved in such a programme, what it entails in practical terms, what benefits might accrue, what resources might be required to see it through, and where these might be obtained. Another important consideration which government will need to make is the message this could send to other countries. It could, for example, send a strong message to other countries that Gabon is providing an opportunity for these people to enhance and consolidate their livelihood security, while at the same time bring benefits to local communities and environs through targeted development activities and opportunities. At the same time, however, caution would need to be exercised to prevent an additional influx of people hoping to cash in on evolving situation.

136. In the absence of documented lessons from other local integration (especially DLI and related) experiences, a small number of considerations are drawn from observation made from during this particular study, enhanced at times from personal and other documented experiences from other situations. While not exhaustive they might, if considered with the broader considerations outlined in the DLI initiative described above, help address and clarify some basic issues and guide further development of an appropriate integration package for RoC refugees in Gabon. The recommendations do not address all of the steps required for this process to happen as this would be inappropriate given the differing needs already identified in this study and low level of appreciation of what the notion of local integration actually entails. The following should therefore be considered as possible next steps to follow.

137. **Step 1.** Prepare a working definition of what “local integration” means and might mean in the present context. While emphasising this might seem unnecessary, a recent review (Dryden-Peterson and Hovill, 2003) highlights just how important this is as many permutations can exist and be shaped to different needs. Clarity and transparency are essential at this stage to avoid later misunderstandings. Refugee integration does not necessarily mean that these individuals will remain in Gabon – in the current instance – indefinitely as they may still choose to move back to the RoC at a later stage if they see additional opportunities there. This will already require broad consultation with intended actors, the course of which should also begin to unfold some key issues to address and possible directions to take.

138. **Step 2.** Commission a “Draft Plan of Action for Local Integration in Gabon”, which would address the following issues, among others:

- protection, especially issues relating to refugee status and nationalisation;
- social and economic studies of needs and opportunities;
- existing and potentially needed institutional arrangements;
- how local integration fits with relevant or planned development initiatives;
- needs assessments of refugees and local communities/individuals in the affected areas; and
- likely funding and other resource needs and opportunities.

139. This draft should be developed from a series of consultations initially at the field (individual and community) level, before proceeding to provincial and capital levels (work started on Recommendation 1 above could be integrated into the development of this plan, benefiting from the consultation processes underway). UNHCR together with the CNR are possibly best placed to co-ordinate this activity. Particular attention needs to be given to two issues:

- While agriculture could become the mainstay of a significant number of refugees in a local integration programme it is inappropriate for it to become the sole mainstay. Other opportunities for livelihood security must be identified and developed in all areas.
- A local integration programme must extend beyond providing support and services to refugees: local people must form an integral part of such an initiative and the needs of these communities must be elaborated at the outset.

140. **Step 3.** Raise awareness of this draft Plan at all levels to inform and allow others to provide input.

141. **Step 4.** Conclude this phase by transforming this Plan into a framework of implementation, outlining specific needs and responsibilities – from communities to ministries and donors – with a clear timeframe. This would then become the basic working document for subsequent discussions, meetings, and consensus building prior to common agreement being reached – or not – on the way forward.

142. Elaboration of such a plan should not proceed alone: current moves towards repatriation and resettlement should continue so that refugees are clear of the messages and their options. Local integration in this context should not be seen as the only option, but could become the preferred option for many who are unable to return home and for whom resettlement remains a distant objective.

143. **Step 5.** Depending on the outcome of the above point, revise or reconsider available options. If strong indications of support emerge for local integration then consideration might be given to some of the broader and generic stages outlined in the DLI initiative referred to above. In a decision to abandon future consideration of local integration for this caseload, then some alternative solutions will need to be introduced to address some if not all of the concerns identified through this study.

Annex 1. Questionnaire

Sécurité des moyens d'existences des réfugiés

Forme d'interview semi-structurée

NOM : SEXE :

AGE : SITE (Region/Localite):

1. POLITIQUE

- a) La loi vous empêche-t-elle de vous livrer à des activités économiques? Respectez-vous cette loi?
- b) Les coutumes locales vous empêchent-elles de vous livrer à des activités économiques?
- c) La politique du gouvernement central est-elle favorable à l'agriculture?
- d) Le gouvernement / l'administration local(e) est-il/elle favorable à l'agriculture?
- e) Avez-vous libre accès aux marchés?
- f) Les coutumes locales vous empêchent-elles d'utiliser les ressources naturelles?
- g) Comment faites-vous / avez-vous fait face à ces restrictions?

2. ENQUÊTE-MÉNAGE

- a) Pays / région d'origine
- b) Groupe ethnique
- c) Composition du ménage: *nombre d'individus dans le ménage, sexe, âge, professions, nombre de personnes à charge (si différent)*
- d) Temps passé au camp
- e) Énumérez, le cas échéant, quelques aspects positifs de la vie au camp
- f) Quels sont quelques-uns des aspects les plus négatifs de la vie au camp?
- g) Quel(le) a été la situation / le problème le/la plus difficile auquel/à laquelle vous avez dû faire face?
- h) Quelle(s) stratégie(s) d'adaptation avez-vous employée(s) pour y faire face? (*p. ex. vente de biens, réduction de la consommation de nourriture, vendre du bois de chauffage, manger moins de ses aliments préférés, abandonner sa famille*)
- i) A votre avis, quelles sont les implications de ces stratégies?
- j) Décrivez la situation de la sécurité à l'intérieur et autour du camp. Y a-t-il des problèmes de sécurité particuliers? Sont-ils différents pour les hommes et les femmes?
- k) Quels groupes au sein de la communauté sont les plus vulnérables? Pourquoi?
- l) Achats les plus fréquents
- m) Source(s) d'achats
- n) Principales sources de revenus, p. ex. Engagement dans un travail occasionnel ou dans des activités génératrices de revenus
- o) Quelles sont vos principales sources de dépenses?
- p) Disposez-vous d'une quelconque source d'emprunt d'argent?

- q) La(les)quelle(s)?
- r) Un esprit de coopération est-il présent au sein de la communauté? *Exemples...*
- s) Cela a-t-il changé avec le temps? Si oui, expliquez

3. MOYENS GÉNÉRAUX D'EXISTENCE: ENQUÊTE DE GROUPE / ENQUÊTE INDIVIDUELLE

- a) Le cas échéant, comment vous êtes-vous préparé à votre départ? (*p. ex. en apportant certains objets*)
- b) Depuis combien de temps êtes-vous dans ce camp / village?
- c) Où étiez-vous avant d'y venir?
- d) (*p. ex. centre de transit, autre camp...*)
- e) Que faisiez-vous (travail actif) avant de fuir votre pays d'origine?
- f) Quelles sont les caractéristiques de votre subsistance actuelle? Quelles activités exercez-vous?
- g) Quelles mesures / actions le HCR a-t-il (entre)prises pour améliorer vos moyens d'existence - au début et plus récemment?
- h) Idem pour les autres agences
- i) Possédez-vous des compétences particulières? (*p. ex. soudage, enseignement? Si oui, s'en est-on enquis et avez-vous été en mesure de les mettre à profit?*)
- j) Quelles possibilités et contraintes commerciales / économiques avez-vous rencontrées à l'intérieur / autour du camp?
- k) Vous a-t-on porté assistance dans ces circonstances? (*p. ex. prêts, formation...*)
- l) Si non, quel genre d'assistance auriez-vous apprécié?
- m) Quelles sont vos principales sources de revenus? Cela a-t-il changé avec le temps?
- n) Quel accès avez-vous eu aux ressources - cliniques, écoles, formations, semences, bois, eau, terres, marchés...?
- o) Limitations actuelles des moyens d'existence - possibilités, solutions et recommandations
- p) À quelles contraintes doit-on faire face pour permettre de meilleures perspectives pour la sécurité des moyens d'existence dans ce camp - ou ailleurs?

4. ALIMENTATION & NUTRITION (AGRICULTURE)

- a) Possédez-vous ou avez-vous accès à des terres? Potager ou plus grande parcelle de terre? (*Si pas de terres, pourquoi?*)
- b) Quelle proportion du camp a accès à des terres?
- c) Cultivez-vous vos propres récoltes? Si oui, lesquelles? Un assolement est-il pratiqué?
- d) Cela est-il suffisant pour satisfaire à vos besoins (aux besoins de votre famille)?
- e) Qui est responsable de la culture / de l'entretien des récoltes dans votre famille?
- f) Quelle proportion de votre nourriture vient de la terre? Cela est-il fiable tout au long de l'année?
- g) Où vous procurez-vous vos semences?
- h) Dépendez-vous des pesticides ou des herbicides? Si oui, d'où viennent-ils? Combien coûtent-ils?
- i) La qualité / le rendement du sol s'est-il/elle modifié(e) avec les années? Décrivez
- j) Quel est l'historique d'un éventuel soutien du PAM?
- k) Recevez-vous des rations alimentaires du PAM / d'ailleurs? Si oui, en quelles quantités? Quelle est leur composition? Leur qualité?...
- l) Avez-vous déjà eu à vendre de la nourriture pour survivre? Si oui, pourquoi et quelles en étaient certaines des implications?

- m) Comment les groupes vulnérables s'en sortent-ils lorsque la nourriture est inexistante?
- n) Vendez-vous toujours des rations alimentaires ou vos propres aliments? Si oui, que vendez-vous? Où le vendez-vous? À quelle fréquence le vendez-vous?...
- o) À qui avez-vous vendu de la nourriture?
- p) Possédez-vous du bétail? *Détails*
- q) Y a-t-il des options pour augmenter la disponibilité de nourriture – la pêche, la chasse? Si oui, décrivez
- r) Quelle source de combustible utilisez-vous? D'où vient-il?
- s) Quel(s) genre(s) de cuisinière utilisez-vous?
- t) Combien de combustible utilisez-vous par semaine? (*s'il provient des marchés, combien d'argent est dépensé*)
- u) Que pourrait-on faire pour améliorer la situation ci-dessus?

5. SANTÉ

- a) Quels problèmes de santé principaux rencontrez-vous aujourd'hui ou avez-vous rencontrés dans le passé? Comment y faites-vous face?
- b) Avez-vous accès à une clinique?
- c) Combien de personnes compte-t-on par médecin? Par infirmière?
- d) Combien de fois par jour mangez-vous?
- e) Avez-vous mangé des fruits ou des légumes au cours des dernières 24 heures?
- f) Vos enfants ont-ils mangé des fruits ou des légumes au cours des dernières 24 heures?
- g) Où vous procurez-vous ces fruits / légumes?
- h) Où vous procurez-vous de l'eau potable? Comment est-elle recueillie et stockée?
- i) Qui dans le ménage est responsable de la collecte de l'eau?
- j) Subissez-vous des pénuries d'eau? Si oui, quelles en sont les conséquences?
- k) Avez-vous des installations sanitaires dans l'enceinte familiale? Si non, où sont-elles? Avec combien de familles les partagez-vous?
- l) Y a-t-il des problèmes d'installations sanitaires dans le camp? Si oui, lesquels, et que fait-on pour les résoudre?
- m) Les installations sanitaires de douches-lavabos sont-elles disponibles et satisfaisantes?

6. ÉDUCATION

- a) Y a-t-il une école? Si oui, à quelle distance se trouve-t-elle de votre logement?
- b) Nombre d'élèves par enseignant
- c) Vos enfants vont-ils à l'école tous les jours?
- d) Vos enfants disposent-ils de leur propre matériel scolaire? Si oui, de quoi se compose-t-il?

7. ÉTUDE DU MARCHÉ

- a) Où se trouve le marché le plus proche? À quelle distance?
- b) Combien de fois y allez-vous? Quel membre de votre famille s'y rend?
- c) Dans quel but principal y allez-vous – pour vendre, acheter...
- d) Qu'y achetez / vendez-vous?
- e) Les aliments frais les plus courants sont-ils disponibles? *Sources.*
- f) Combien coûtent le bois et le charbon de bois? Comment ces prix se comparent-ils à ceux de la ville?
- g) Faites-vous la collecte de produits naturels (bois, miel...) dans le but de les vendre? Si oui, où vous les procurez-vous?

8. MATÉRIELS & RESSOURCES

- a) Quels matériels vous a-t-on remis (bidons d'eau, bâche en plastique, casseroles...) à votre arrivée?
- b) Le cas échéant, quels outils vous a-t-on donnés à votre arrivée?
- c) Étaient-ils appropriés?
- d) Quels sont les matériels et ressources les plus courants que vous utilisez?
- e) Quand vous a-t-on fourni les outils les plus récents?
- f) Quels sont les outils les plus nécessaires et les plus appréciés?
- g) Comment la situation pourrait-elle être améliorée?

9. POSSIBILITÉS

- a) Lors de votre arrivée, quelles étaient les possibilités dont vous disposiez pour assurer votre soutien et celui de vos familles? En avez-vous profité? Si oui, comment, et quels en ont été les résultats?
- b) Quelles sont les possibilités d'emploi existantes à l'heure actuelle?
- c) Disposez-vous de qualifications professionnelles reconnues? Si oui, quelle en est la nature et par qui ont-elles été fournies?
- d) Mettez-vous ces compétences en pratique? Si non, pourquoi?
- e) Comment aurait-on pu vous venir en aide au tout début de votre séjour?
- f) Une formation vous a-t-elle été dispensée dans le but de promouvoir / favoriser des compétences spécifiques?
- g) Avez-vous demandé une telle formation? Si oui, quel en a été le résultat?
- h) Lorsque vous repartirez [en Érythrée], quelles activités envisagez-vous d'entreprendre?
- i) Prévoyez-vous des contraintes qui pourraient vous empêcher d'entreprendre ces activités?

Interview menée par:

Traduite par:

Durée de l'interview:

Annex 2. Terms of reference

MISSION TO GABON LIVELIHOOD SECURITY STRATEGIES AND OPTIONS FOR REFUGEES 22 October – 4 November 2003

David Stone, Consultant to UNHCR's Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit (EPAU)
Machtelt De Vriese, Associate Evaluation and Policy Analysis Officer (EPAU)

Livelihood mechanisms and strategies denote the way(s) in which refugees and others can periodically assess their situation, review opportunities and try to realign actions in order to arrive at a better level of well/being and security – for the immediate future as well as the long-term.

As a follow-up to previous work to investigate the nature of protracted refugee operations in various parts of the world, UNHCR's Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit is undertaking a new phase of work to review opportunities being taken or missed regarding promoting livelihood security options among refugees, returnees and members of host communities.

This mission, which would involve interactive discussions with UNHCR Gabon, selected refugees and refugee groups, government agencies and partners, as appropriate, would undertake the following assignments:

- Following discussions with Branch Office and partners, where applicable, undertake on site assessments to determine some of the major coping strategies for livelihood security developed, or being used, by refugees in selected sites.
- Assess the extent to which UNHCR and other actors have supported refugee livelihood strategies, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of any such initiatives.
- Identify and, where possible, evaluate the impact of refugees and refugee operations on selected groups of local host communities.
- Assess the existing assistance programme with a view to identifying gaps and how these can be bridged.
- Evaluate the options for enhancing livelihood security among rural refugees and, in particular, among vulnerable groups.
- Extract and develop lesson learned on livelihood security approaches, particularly among selected refugee groups.
- Examine future prospects, making concrete proposals for the ways in which UNHCR and others (including government counterparts) can introduce new strategies in support of refugee livelihoods.
- Recommend measures that can be applied to support refugees without UNHCR field presence.
- Further develop and refine the livelihood security methodology being developed by EPAU.

Preliminary findings from the above will be shared with UNHCR, government and interested partners before the end of the mission.

EPAU/September 2003

Annex 3. Map



Gabon Atlas Map

As of December 2003

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