



COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN

OVERVIEW

Country: Malawi

Planning Year: 2006

2006 Country Operations Plan-UNHCR Malawi

Part I: OVERVIEW

1. Protection and Socio-Economic Operational Environment

Malawi has continued to enjoy a peaceful environment. In 2004, though fraught by a few demonstrations, a new Government was elected under peaceful conduct and the country continues to enjoy stability.

Malawi is rated as one of the poorest countries in the world. About 65% of the population live below the poverty datum line. The poor state of the country's economy is evident in the poor living conditions of the surrounding villages where the refugee camps are situated. This affects the delivery of assistance to the camps as per UNHCR standards without creating marked disparity between the two communities.

Malawi is party to a number of International Instruments, such as the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol being part of them. Malawi has also ratified the 1969 OAU Convention. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and the ICPR of 1966 and ECOSOC are among others that Malawi ratified. Malawi has also enacted a Refugee Law which guides the implementation of activities related to asylum seekers/refugees in the country. The existence of these legal instruments have greatly facilitated the work of UNHCR in Malawi on matters related to refugees and asylum seekers.

The nine reservations made to the 1951 Convention by Malawi Government however placed several impediments to implementation of UNHCR activities in the Country. Such challenges have thwarted efforts towards implementing local integration activities including wage earning, freedom of movement, employment, and the proper conduct of their businesses in urban centres is also being frustrated by authorities.

The foregoing have thus, presented as the main attraction for asylum seekers coming into the country. Moreover, Malawi's proximity to the countries of conflict of the Great Lakes Region renders it the gateway to other Southern African states with more promising lives for the future as compared with the war-torn countries of the Great Lakes Region has been the major pulling factor for asylum seekers transiting through Malawi.

The generous asylum policy in Malawi nevertheless, permits many of the asylum seekers to enter the country without much difficulty; although for some, the ultimate aim would be to transit through it. This was observed during the head count exercises conducted in August 2003 and the verification exercise that was conducted from September to December 2004, where significant reductions in the registered asylum seekers compared to actual figures obtained from the exercises were noticeably reduced.

Despite the foregoing, a number of genuine asylum seekers see Malawi as their final asylum destination as some of those who arrived in 1994 and later are still living at the Dzaleka Camp.

The Malawi population is equally receptive to the asylum seekers and refugees. This is evident by the harmonious co-existence between the refugee settlements in Dzaleka and Luwani with the surrounding local population. Despite the high population density of Dowa district where Dzaleka camp is established, no conflicts have arisen as a result of refugee presence in the area.

The majority of the caseload in Malawi comes from the Great Lakes Region. Many of the refugees arrived from early 2001 with the highest peak in late 2002 and early 2003 following the continued conflict in that region and application of the cessation clause for Rwandan Refugees in Tanzania in 2002. UNHCR has noted a reduction in the number of asylum applications from 2004 to-date.

2. Operational goals and Potential for Durable Solutions

With the aspect of local integration as UNHCR's main durable solution for refugees in 2006, agriculture as a means of promoting self-sufficiency would be the key element in ensuring that objective. As such, the irrigation project within Luwani Camp is foreseen as the best way in promoting agriculture in that area as a means of self-sufficiency. The main objectives/goals of the irrigation project is to increase and improve refugee family self reliance through enhancing the productivity of land resources availed to the refugees in the camp and this would ably be achieved by:

- Optimizing the use of available agriculture land, which otherwise lies idle during the dry season
- Improving the delivery of domestic water services with a view to reduce time spent in collecting water, thus releasing the drawers of water for other economically beneficial activities

It should be noted that food, which is provided by WFP, has not been factored because the MOU that was signed between UNHCR, GoM, Malawi Red Cross Society and WFP will end by December 2005.

As part of the strategy for the gradual phase out of the Dzaleka Camp, WFP has proposed cutting the current food ration to refugees by half while maintaining the same rations in Luwani Camp. It should be noted however, that increased food productivity in Luwani will not only rely on the irrigation project but also on the provision of supplementary agriculture inputs that UNHCR has been providing such as starter pack.

From the onset, UNHCR will solicit the views of the Refugee Community in order to instill a sense of ownership of the Project by the Refugee and surrounding community population both in the planning and implementation stages. There will also be need to engage the refugees in the construction process of the irrigation population. With the engagement of the UNV Water Irrigation Specialist, there will be need for comprehensive community mobilization that will in effect breed a sense of ownership of the scheme. In essence, UNHCR will also contribute to enhancing the economic welfare of the surrounding population that is predominantly poor. This will also serve to enhance harmonious co-existence with the surrounding community that encompasses the camp.

Also programmed are special policy priorities that include combating HIV/AIDS among the refugee population, securing environmental protection and optimal resource utilization. HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns will be intensified to reduce infections.

Following extensive needs assessments at the field level by both UNHCR and its partners, the projected funding requirement for the 2006 UNHCR Malawi Refugee Program amounts to approximately US\$2,004,500 of which UNHCR has committed US\$1, 632, 000. This however is a constraint to achieving the huge infrastructural development required to make the camp fully operational. Note that, Dzaleka already has all the necessary infrastructure including a fully functional Primary School within the camp and easy access to Secondary Education in the surrounding area.

From the foregoing, the estimated budget will have to focus only on those areas deemed as priority and UNHCR Malawi envisages that infrastructural development will take center stage. .

The capacity-building activities for both the Government and key Implementing Partners will remain one of the most important activities of UNHCR. The capacity building of Judiciary and high-level authorities (including Parliamentarian Groups & concerned Cabinets) will be the central element in leading to the lift of reservations in the present Refugee Act.