

LIBERIA

INITIAL OBJECTIVES

- Monitor and advocate the protection and welfare of Liberian returnees and other war-affected populations; and consolidate reintegration projects in returnee communities to make return lasting and stable.
- Protect Sierra Leonean refugees and refine assistance by encouraging refugee participation and prioritising activities that foster self-sufficiency; support the gradual return of individual Sierra Leonean refugees and remain vigilant to security conditions in Sierra Leone in preparation for organised voluntary repatriation.
- Complete the community-based manufacture of 5,000 fuel-efficient ecological stoves and continue tree planting and environmental awareness-raising activities in selected refugee sites and host communities.
- Empower returnee and refugee women and young girls, particularly victims of sexual violence, through education and skills training to help them counter aggression and violence in their communities.
- Identify solutions for urban refugees and help them meet their basic needs; and make post-secondary scholarships available for refugee students.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS, PROGRESS ACHIEVED AND CONSTRAINTS

Liberian Returnees

The security situation in Liberia's Lofa county - particularly in Voinjama and surrounding villages - continued to deteriorate with renewed fighting reportedly triggering the displacement of up to 35,000 local residents and refugees as of February. Harassment of civilians continued in Foya, alleged to be a forward base for Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels. Repeated, violent incidents underpinned

the importance and urgency of instilling discipline through training of the country's security officers, and of enforcing implementation of the Declaration on the Rights and Security of Liberian Returnees. The volatile situation in Lofa county made it impossible to repatriate any refugees to this area and very difficult to resume humanitarian activities.

The reopening of the border between Guinea and Liberia in April marked the end of a nine-month suspension of voluntary repatriation convoys between the two countries. The first convoy reached Liberia on 25 May carrying more than 260 returnees. A special convoy was organised for 25 unaccompanied minors, many of whom had been separated from their families for over eight years. UNHCR's NGO partner began tracing their immediate family members in the Pleebo and Harper areas of Maryland county. Another positive development occurred in May when the long-awaited ferry on the Cavalla River crossing from Côte d'Ivoire became operational. The inaugural convoy crossed the river on 3 May, with subsequent convoys at the rate of two per week. However, poor roads in Liberia and a shortage of trucks for transporting returnees slowed movements. Nevertheless, more than 22,600 Liberians repatriated with or without transport assistance between January and June. In addition, the Government registered 14,000 spontaneous returnees during the same period, bringing the overall total to almost 370,000.

Plans to complete rehabilitation of social and physical infrastructure in main areas of return by the end of June were altered as logistical and political constraints required UNHCR to extend reintegration activities until December 2000. Eighteen Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) begun in 1999 for rehabilitation of four agricultural facilities, 11 schools and three health centres were completed and eighteen new QIPs were begun for rehabilitation of ten schools, three health centres, one agricultural facility, three sanitary facilities and one road/bridge. More than 150 schools servicing 68,000 chil-

dren received basic school supplies and furniture as well as assistance in managing and organising girls' clubs. Some 1,500 teachers were trained at two teacher's training institutes rehabilitated by UNHCR. UNHCR's reintegration programme (approximately 150 QIPs have been completed to date) has made it possible for returnees to integrate in areas which previously did not have any public services or where infrastructure had been destroyed beyond repair.

UNHCR also funded a water project for the rehabilitation and construction of 24 wells and boreholes and an initiative to strengthen the functioning of 187 community water committees. Five training centres have been established for returning Liberian women and girls, with a view to helping them care for their families and assume increased responsibility for their lives. These centres also catered to women and children among the resident population. The centres offered courses on literacy, cattle raising, needle-work, tie-dyeing, sewing, cooking and housekeeping for more than 3,000 women and adolescent girls. Some women and girls now have simple reading skills, can write their names and keep basic records of their small businesses. Others have acquired skills they are using to support themselves and their families, giving them a certain degree of independence and boosting their sense of worth.

To further enhance local economic development, UNHCR had planned to create a new micro-credit scheme in Maryland county as well as to add loan capital to increase the capacity of the existing micro-credit portfolio in Montserrado county. But the project in Maryland was cancelled as an international NGO began operating a larger micro-credit scheme there. However, the capacity of the project in Montserrado was further extended to accommodate up to 3,500 clients. To date, 800 returnees (formerly refugees or IDPs) as well as local residents have received loans for small businesses through four national NGOs. This has enhanced the welfare and self-esteem of the recipients, helped them provide adequate

food for their families and made it possible for their children to attend school. It has also contributed to revitalise local markets, for example in Zwedru in eastern Liberia.

Three workshops on international protection were organised for the Liberian Joint Security (comprising police, immigration and customs officials) and NGO partners in collaboration with the Liberian Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC) and human rights agencies. Nearly 300 people attended the workshops, which covered international refugee law, international and national refugee instruments (including Liberia's 1993 Refugee Act), human rights monitoring and paralegal training (with particular focus on women, children and gender-based violence).

Sierra Leonean Refugees

UNHCR helped refugees located in Grand Cape Mount and Montserrado counties meet their basic needs for potable water and adequate sanitary facilities through the construction of wells, latrines and bathhouses. Assistance also included education for refugee children, health and community services as well as legal support. Additional help was also given for the construction of refugee shelters and agricultural production, and complementary food was distributed to vulnerable refugees. The Office encouraged refugees to participate in several sectors. For example, 288 hectares of agricultural land were identified together with the authorities and refugees were given tools and seeds enabling them to produce cassava, swamp rice and vegetables. Health and hygiene education continued, and preparations were made to transfer responsibility for constructing and maintaining sanitary facilities to the refugees.

UNHCR has established twenty centres for skills training, accelerated learning and primary education for Sierra Leonean refugee women and girls in the camps. More than 1,000 refugee women and girls attended courses on soap-making, tie-dyeing, sewing, cattle-raising and basic literacy. More than 2,000 girls had access to basic primary education and over 70 teenage

girls attended high schools. A further 150 girls aged 10 to 24 attended accelerated learning courses. In addition, five workshops were held on female genital mutilation.

Activities begun in 1999 to nurture the environment in refugee areas in Grand Cape Mount and Montserrado through education and awareness-building, community-based tree-planting and care (50,000 seedlings) and the construction of 5,000 ecological stoves were completed. This brought about visible improvements in and around the camps, as well as increased interest and awareness of environmental preservation among the refugees. Following the relocation of refugees from Lofa county to Sinje in late 1999, UNHCR undertook preventive measures (tree marking) at the new site in early 2000. A campaign to raise environmental awareness among the refugees was also launched together with the agency responsible for site planning. This was followed by training in tree-planting and the production of ecological stoves, both of which are ongoing.

The security situation in Lofa county prevented UNHCR from having free and unhindered access to Sierra Leonean refugees living there. However, by early 2000, most camp-based refugees had been transferred from Lofa to Grand Cape Mount. These refugees left their fields and supplementary food sources behind, and it was only towards the end of the reporting period that newly established fields around Sinje began to provide sufficient yields.

The breakdown of the peace process in Sierra Leone and the resulting lack of access to most areas of return did not bode well for voluntary repatriation. Although it was foreseen that up to 20,000 Sierra Leonean refugees would require UNHCR's assistance to repatriate in 2000, very few considered it safe enough to return.

Urban Refugees

UNHCR protected 44 urban refugees and their dependants and assisted them with living allowances and health services. Plans to encourage self-sufficiency among this group have not yet yielded the desired results, as the small

business proposals submitted by the refugees were often unrealistic in terms of financial requirements and scope. A total of 26 refugees continued their studies at the AME University and the Tubman National Institute of Medical Arts. Twenty refugee students attended the University of Liberia, but had to make arrangements to transfer to universities in Ghana when it was announced that the University of Liberia was closing indefinitely.

REVISED OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITY ACTIVITIES FOR JULY - DECEMBER

Liberian Returnees

The initial deadline for repatriation and reintegration was reviewed in February, when it was decided to further extend these activities until December 2000. UNHCR's activities in Liberia will focus on completing all QIPs by year-end and helping NGO partners build additional capacity to ensure continuation of services after UNHCR's withdrawal. To ensure that projects are sustainable, UNHCR will create links with other agencies involved in development activities for an efficient hand-over.

In addition to the objectives described above, which remain unchanged, UNHCR will:

- Provide additional assistance to line ministries and specialist agencies to standardise the approach towards micro-credits and water supply in rural areas; and
- Make additional loan capital available for micro-credits and increase the scope of the existing scheme.

Sierra Leonean Refugees

Although voluntary repatriation continues to be dictated by security conditions in Sierra Leone, UNHCR will remain prepared to assist in the return of up to 9,000 Sierra Leoneans during the second half of the year. Humanitarian assistance to Sierra Leonean refugees will continue, with emphasis on self-sufficiency and advocacy for respect of human rights among law enforcement agencies. Projects to improve the well-being of women and girls will con-

tinue, particularly skills-training, counselling and other forms of social support.

Adding to the initial objectives for Sierra Leonean refugees, UNHCR will also:

- Implement - in the context of the Brookings Process - several projects with a potential cross-border impact including training and refresher courses for refugee teachers and health personnel, an improved refugee profile database, environmental education and rehabilitation in refugee areas and

capacity-building for national NGOs; and- Develop training materials on the alleviation of gender-based violence and organise additional workshops on the reduction of female genital mutilation.

Urban Refugees

UNHCR will continue to explore potential solutions to the situation of urban refugees, in particular how to improve their self-sufficiency. Further support for feasibility studies as well as training in small business management will be provided to interested refugees.

FINANCIAL DATA (USD)

	Initial Budget	Revised Budget	Total Funds Available*	Total Funds Obligated
AB and TF	16,362,412	17,629,432	10,097,682	10,029,400
SP	1,248,000	1,800,000	0	0
TOTAL	17,610,412	19,429,432	10,097,682	10,029,400

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

