



Responding to protracted refugee situations

*A case study of Liberian
refugees in Ghana*

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Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit

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Preface: The UNHCR protracted refugee situations initiative

UNHCR and other members of the humanitarian community have a natural tendency to concentrate their attention on situations where major changes and population movements are taking place: new refugee emergencies and large-scale repatriation programmes. But the majority of UNHCR's beneficiaries find themselves trapped in protracted refugee situations, unable to go home and without the prospect of a solution in the country where they have found asylum.

Such situations, which are often characterized by long-term care and maintenance programmes and the confinement of refugees to camps, are not in the interest of the refugees, local populations, host governments or donor states. And yet they have been allowed to persist. Why is this so, and what can be done to remedy this situation?

In order to address these issues, UNHCR has conducted a series of studies into protracted refugee situations (PRS), with funding provided by the Population, Refugees and Migration Bureau of the US State Department. The questions being asked in each case are: how have UNHCR and other actors responded to protracted refugee situations? Which of these responses have worked and which have not? And what elements of the successful responses can be applied to current and future protracted situations?

The findings from these case studies will feed into a broader, organization-wide examination of protracted refugee situations and are expected to lead to the development of a more vigorous policy and to practical guidelines for managing such situations.

The present report, on Liberian refugees in Ghana, is one of the case studies. Others in the series include Sudanese and Somalis in Kenya, Sierra Leoneans in Guinea, Liberians in Côte d'Ivoire, Sahrawis in Algeria, Sudanese in Uganda, Guatemalans in Mexico, and more.

This study has been prepared by Shelly Dick, an independent researcher. While the report has been commissioned by UNHCR, and drafts have been circulated and commented upon by relevant UNHCR staff members, the opinions expressed herein are those of the author alone.

The case study component of the PRS initiative is managed by the Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit and has been advised by a steering committee comprising staff members from the Division of Operational Support (Reintegration and Local Settlement Section, Programme Coordination and Operations Support Section, Health and Community Development Section), the Department of International Protection and the Regional Bureau for Africa.

Scope and methodology

This report, which is part of a wider review undertaken by the Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit (EPAU), provides an analysis of UNHCR responses to the needs of Liberian refugees who have lived in Ghana since 1990.

It would appear that the Ghana case represents a successful example of UNHCR's efforts to provide material assistance to a refugee population and to facilitate refugee self-reliance by gradually withdrawing that assistance over a period of ten years. UNHCR's focus has shifted from a long-term care and maintenance programmes for Liberian refugees, to a voluntary repatriation programme and now to legal protection for the residual caseload. The main objective of this review was to assess the apparent effectiveness of UNHCR responses in the transition from full assistance to no assistance and to evaluate the implications of this transition in regards to refugee self-reliance, refugee protection and durable solutions.

Building upon information obtained from six weeks of field research conducted in Ghana at Buduburam Refugee Settlement during the summer of 2000, the consultant returned to the same location in August 2001 to conduct this evaluation over a period of two weeks. On both research trips, the consultant lived among Liberian refugees at Buduburam Camp and participated in the daily routine of their lives. As a result, the study is largely derived from refugee inputs.

The consultant also invited input from UNHCR staff members, representatives of former partner organizations, the United States Regional Refugee Coordinator for Resettlement based in Accra and the Ghana Refugee Board (see Annex). In addition, interviews with some members of the host community living in the village near Buduburam and in Accra made it possible to gain a general understanding of host community attitudes and concerns in regards to Liberian refugees.

The primary method of research was informal interviewing and focus group discussions with a view to allowing refugees and others interviewed to highlight the issues of concern to them. Careful attention was given to the views of refugee women and an effort was made to interview a wide variety of refugees in order to gain a better understanding of the diversity of perspectives and opinions. In addition, a wide range of documents, including a master's thesis written by the consultant on similar issues, UNHCR documents and academic articles on the Liberian refugee situation were consulted.

Several people must be acknowledged for making it possible to conduct research for this report. UNHCR Ghana provided the consultant with logistical support. Other individuals working on issues related to Liberian refugees offered their insights, which was greatly appreciated. And most of all, special thanks should be extended to Liberian refugees at Buduburam who willingly contributed information and their opinions for this study.

Summary of findings and recommendations

Principal findings

1. While refugees interviewed were willing to discuss UNHCR responses to their protracted refugee situation, the issues of greater concern to them concerned the matter of their current uncertain legal status in Ghana and their own efforts to survive in Ghana independent of UNHCR assistance.
2. Throughout the 1990s the Ghanaian government considered the Liberians as prima facie refugees. UNHCR was responsible for registering all camp refugees, who then became recipients of international assistance.
3. The failure of refugees to return home and the withdrawal of UNHCR assistance in 2000 precipitated the host government's decision to re-evaluate the asylum claims of Liberians in Ghana. By March 2000 the Ghana Refugee Board began a screening process to determine which Liberians had a legitimate claim to continued refugee protection in Ghana.
4. Of approximately 9,000 heads of families at Buduburam Camp who were screened by the Ghana Refugee Board in 2000, 3,449 were granted refugee status. About 500 family heads were excluded from the screening process owing to a shortage of application forms. However, the Refugee Board, which makes decisions on asylum claims, is currently being restructured. As of September 2001, all asylum interviews and decisions regarding Liberian refugees were postponed until further notice.
5. The legal status of Liberians in Ghana is currently unclear. They fall into several categories that include the old caseload, a new caseload from Lofa County where fighting persists, those who have been screened, those who have not been screened, those who have been granted official refugee status and those who have been denied status. Those denied refugee status continue to live at Buduburam Camp as de facto refugees along with those granted status and those not yet screened.
6. Refugees interviewed offered the following reasons for their decision to remain in Ghana. They consider Liberia to be unsafe. Those who have started businesses or are studying in Ghana are reluctant to leave. The lack of capital necessary to start over in Liberia prevents many from repatriating. The incentive to return home is blunted by the more attractive possibility of resettlement to the United States from Ghana.
7. Although Liberians in Ghana have a right to become naturalized Ghanaian citizens or to apply for residency under the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) provisions, they claim that these options are impractical due to systemic bottlenecks and host country attitudes toward foreigners.

8. The host government and UNHCR Ghana seem to hold conflicting perspectives concerning Liberian refugees in regard to their ability to be self-reliant. Already hard-pressed to address the needs of Ghanaian nationals, the host government views Liberian refugees as an added economic burden and claims it is unable to assist them. For their part, UNHCR Ghana staff recognize that vulnerable refugees remain in need of assistance, but consider the majority of them to be self-sufficient and capable of looking after their own needs. Funding constraints prevent UNHCR Ghana from assisting even vulnerable refugees.

9. It appears that UNHCR's involvement in long-term care and maintenance programmes prior to June 2000 gave the government an impression of an asylum/assistance linkage and raised expectations that UNHCR would provide material assistance as long as refugees remain in Ghana. The government expects UNHCR to assist the 3,449 refugee families that have been granted asylum.

10. National security concerns came to the fore when riots broke out at the camp in March 2001. Police were deployed to quell the violence. Buduburam has remained peaceful since then, but Ghanaian police posted at the entrance of the camp during the day continue to monitor camp activities. UNHCR has been monitoring the treatment of arrested Liberians.

11. Currently UNHCR Ghana oversees legal protection for Liberian refugees by advising the Ghana Refugee Board and recommending asylum applicants to them. One morning per week, the UNHCR Protection Officer provides counselling to Liberian asylum-seekers. Liberian refugees are very concerned about their ambiguous legal status in Ghana and there is great need for the issue to be resolved in the near future.

12. All stakeholders interviewed concluded that UNHCR had been a great help to refugees in the initial emergency stages of their exile. Food, water, shelter and clothing were provided. Refugees interviewed also expressed a high level of satisfaction with the education and vocational training services provided by the International Rescue Committee.

13. However, agricultural and micro-loan programmes intended to facilitate refugee self-reliance were reported to have had limited success. In addition, as the situation became more protracted, old caseload refugees alleged that assistance intended for refugees arrived sporadically. Many newer arrivals to the camp never received UNHCR assistance so they either did not comment on UNHCR responses or else criticized the organization for failing to assist them.

14. With limited and dwindling assistance from UNHCR, remittances have proved crucial in enabling the refugees to survive in Ghana. Their effect is felt beyond their immediate recipients. Many refugees have invested remittance money into small businesses, thus fuelling the camp economy. And those without access to remittances depend on the generosity of friends and family who share their resources. Social networks both in the camp and in the United States enable many to survive.

15. However, not all refugees benefit equally from remittances and some resort to negative coping mechanisms, such as prostitution and concubinage, to support themselves.

16. Currently, Liberian refugees go about the business of survival, some carving out a better life for themselves than others. While there are vulnerable refugees in great need, most refugees manage to provide for their own food, housing and clothing needs at no extra cost to the host government or UNHCR. In addition, refugees are using their own resources to run their own schools and churches.

17. Refugees generally live at peace with Ghanaian villagers in the Gomoa District, renting houses from them, trading with them, intermarrying and socializing together

18. The problems that Liberians now face are largely due to high unemployment, lack of adequate social services and rising inflation in Ghana. Refugees expressed special concern for better medical care, improved sanitation at the camp and greater opportunities for education and employment.

Recommendations

19. In the Ghana protracted refugee situation, UNHCR's role should take the form of legal advocacy, rather than an ongoing focus on assistance programmes. If a status determination screening exercise is conducted, as in the Ghana case, every effort should be made to ensure that process is effective, efficient, fair and complete. In addition, a policy should be in place to clarify the legal status of asylum-seekers whose claims have been denied.

20. In order to avoid perpetuating expectations of open-ended assistance provision, UNHCR from the outset needs to make clear to refugees and to the host government what it means by refugee protection. If this is not clearly stated, refugees and the host government will conclude, on the basis of UNHCR's initial response, that refugee protection equals material assistance. If the host government's willingness to offer asylum is conditioned upon UNHCR's willingness to provide material assistance, refugee protection could potentially be jeopardized when assistance is withdrawn. Efforts must be made from the beginning to guard against this possibility.

21. Care and maintenance programmes should not be left open-ended, but should have a clear cut-off date, preferably within a year or two of when refugees arrive in the host country. If this is not done, UNHCR runs the risk of perpetuating the very situation of refugee vulnerability that it wishes to alleviate. The Ghana case suggests that because vulnerability was the criteria for receiving aid, refugees who were not necessarily the most vulnerable were encouraged to maintain the appearance of vulnerability in order to continue receiving assistance.

22. Refugees should be informed from the outset that assistance is temporary and will be gradually withdrawn in a said amount of time. This will allow refugees time to adjust their expectations and encourage them to look for assistance alternatives.

23. Energies should be invested into facilitating linkages with local and international development organizations so that UNHCR is free to focus on protection while others carry on with assisting refugees to find solutions to their evolving needs.

24. To facilitate economic self-reliance, UNHCR should ensure that refugees are able to exercise the rights to freedom of movement, access to employment (defined to include employment in the informal sector) and public education. The ability of the refugees to exercise these rights in Ghana has contributed to their relative success.

Introduction

25. This study was undertaken to evaluate UNHCR's responses to the protracted Liberian refugee situation in Ghana and to analyse the implications of those responses for refugee self-reliance, refugee protection and durable solutions. Throughout the 1990s, UNHCR provided assistance to as many as 20,000 Liberian refugees in Ghana. Currently approximately 9,000 Liberian households¹ are said to remain at Buduburam Refugee Settlement, but assistance to this group was officially phased out in June 2000 in line with a regional policy.

26. In the first part of the report, an overview of the origins of the influx and host government, host community and UNHCR responses to the refugee influx during the 1990s is given. The analysis then focuses primarily upon refugee responses to assistance they received and factors contributing to and hindering their ability to become self-reliant.

27. Liberian refugees, displaying a great deal of ingenuity and resourcefulness, have proven that they are capable of surviving without aid in Ghana due in large part to their own coping mechanisms and not as a direct result of UNHCR programmes. However, contrary to what might be expected, refugees' ability to survive without international assistance does not automatically equate with self-reliance. Many Liberian refugees have become dependent on remittances received from family and friends in the United States and some have resorted to negative coping strategies in order to survive.

28. In the second part of the report, the implications of stakeholder responses for current refugee protection and durable solutions were considered. It appears that UNHCR's long-term care and maintenance programmes have given the host government the impression that material assistance is part and parcel of asylum. As a result, the withdrawal of assistance to Liberians in June 2000 has led to a re-evaluation of Liberian refugee claims. The matter is of great concern to many Liberians in Ghana, especially for those who have not yet been interviewed by the Ghana Refugee Board and for those who have been denied refugee status by the Board, yet continue to remain at Buduburam Refugee Settlement in Ghana.

29. Finally, refugee perceptions are addressed and the consultant offers her reflections on the protracted refugee situation under review.

¹ At 31 December 2001, some 14,200 persons were listed as of concern to UNHCR..

Responses in the 1990s

Origins of the influx

30. To understand the origins of Liberia's refugee crisis it is important to go back to the beginning of the nation's history.² Founded in 1847 as a quasi-American colony for freed slaves and persons rescued from slaving ships, Liberia became the first republic in Africa. The ex-slaves and their descendants, known as the Congos or Americo-Liberians, governed the country by indirect rule until 1980.³ Indigenous Liberians were relegated to second-class status and opportunities to access economic and political power were limited.⁴ Frustration with the Americo elite paved the way for Samuel Doe, a junior level, indigenous military officer to take over the country in a military coup in 1980.⁵

31. Any hopes for improvements under an indigenous leader were soon dashed. Doe's rule was characterized by suspicion and brutality.⁶ In response to two coup attempts led by Thomas Quiwonkpa, Doe sent Krahn and Mandingo government troops to loot and kill Quiwonkpa's Gio and Mano supporters in Nimba County thus fomenting ethnic conflict in Liberia.⁷ Meanwhile, throughout the 1980s the United States supported Doe's regime, primarily owing to Liberia's strategic importance in the Cold War era.⁸

32. The conflict that caused Liberian refugees to flee to Ghana and other West African countries began on 24 December 1989 in Nimba County, Liberia. Charles Taylor, who had connections to Quiwonkpa, mobilized Gio and Mano rebel soldiers originally intending to oust Doe. However, although Doe was killed on 9 September 1990, fighting did not stop. Rebel forces splintered into several ethnic-based factions. Each rebel leader was bent on winning the presidency in order to control and profit

² A fuller analysis of the origins of the Liberian refugee can be found in S. Dick *Liberians in Ghana: living without humanitarian assistance*, UNHCR Working Paper No 57, 2002.

³ L. Sanneh, "American Colonisation and the Founding of Liberia", *Abolitionists Abroad: American Blacks and the Making of Modern West Africa*, Harvard, Harvard University Press, 1999.

⁴ J. Liebenow, *Liberia: The Evolution of Privilege*, New York, Cornell University Press, 1969, pp. 131-147.

⁵ A. Sawyer, *The Emergence of Autocracy in Liberia: Tragedy and Challenge*, California, Institute of Contemporary Studies Press, 1992.

⁶ P. Gifford, *Christianity and Politics in Doe's Liberia*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 16-22; Sawyer, *The Emergence of Autocracy*, pp. 293-294.

⁷ S. Ellis, "Liberia 1989-1994, A Study of Ethnic and Spiritual Violence," *African Affairs*, 1995, 94, pp. 176-179.

⁸ M. Sesay, "Civil War and Collective Intervention in Liberia," *Review of African Political Economy*, 1996, 67, p. 39.

from the country's lucrative natural resources.⁹ The conflict was characterized by generalized violence, rampant looting and the brutal killing of civilians.

33. Because of Liberia's close historical relationship with the US, it was expected that the US would intervene to stabilize the situation. However, at the crucial point in August 1990, America's attention was diverted by the Gulf War.¹⁰ Fearing that the situation in Liberia might destabilize the entire region, ECOWAS responded by sending in the ECOWAS Military Observer Group (ECOMOG) on a peace-keeping mission. ECOWAS states agreed to install an interim government in Monrovia. However, Charles Taylor refused to recognize this government and took control of 'Greater Liberia', which comprised almost 90 per cent of the country.¹¹ Finally by August 1996, upon realizing that he could not win the presidency and Monrovia by force, Taylor pursued a diplomatic path by signing the Abuja Accords thus marking the official end of Liberia's civil war.

34. An election was held in July 1997, and Taylor finally gained the presidency of Liberia in what was considered to be a free and fair election. However, it is argued that the hastiness of elections and the fears of the people gave Taylor the upper hand.¹²

35. By the end of the war, there were an estimated 200,000 war casualties out of pre-war population of 2.8 million. In addition there were approximately 1.4 million internally displaced persons within Liberian and 750,000 refugees. By 1997, approximately 17,000 Liberian refugees resided in Ghana.¹³

Host community responses

36. Initial host community generosity played a key role in ensuring refugee survival during the emergency phase. Ghanaian churches and concerned individuals provided the refugees with food, clothing and other necessities. The surrounding community took people in, offered transportation between the camp and Accra and responded with genuine concern for the refugees. Ghanaian women even cooked food for the new arrivals until the refugees requested dry rations to cook for themselves.

37. Buduburam Camp is adjacent to a Ghanaian village, and over time the refugees have spread beyond the camp to live in the village and surrounding areas in Gomoa District. Some Liberian refugees have purchased land in the area though it is not clear whether they are legally entitled to do so. So far, the issue has not become a

⁹ Ellis, "Liberia 1989-1994," pp. 169-174; W. Reno, "The Business of War in Liberia," *Current History*, 1996, 95, pp. 211-215.

¹⁰ Ellis, "Liberia 1989-1994," p.168.

¹¹ S. Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War*, London, Hurst and Company, 1999, pp. 150-188; E. Aning, "Ghana, ECOWAS and the Liberian Crisis: An Analysis of Ghana's Role in Liberia," *Liberian Studies Journal*, 1999, 21:2, pp. 259-299.

¹² D. Harris, "From 'Warlord' to 'Democratic' President: How Charles Taylor Won the 1997 Liberian Elections," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 1999, 37:3, pp. 431-455; US Department of State, "Liberia: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – 2000," February 2001.

¹³ T. Kamara, "Liberia: Can Peace Be Consolidated?" WRITENET Paper No. 13, 1999.

matter of concern to the government because most refugees cannot afford to purchase land or they prefer not to since they view their stay in Ghana as temporary.

38. More commonly refugees enter into lease agreements with Ghanaians either renting houses already built or leasing land at a lower cost and building their own housing on the property. Typically if the latter arrangement is made, Liberians pay a small amount to lease the land for the first three to five years after which time they are expected to pay a higher rent. Whatever structures they have built on the land revert to the landowner upon their departure.

39. Land conflicts have arisen periodically when Liberians attempt to build just outside the boundary of the camp without paying for the land. In some cases, newly constructed houses in these areas have been destroyed by Ghanaian landowners.

40. Generally speaking Liberians and Ghanaians have coexisted peacefully in the camp district. Intermarriage is relatively common. Additionally, Ghanaians and Liberians buy and sell from one another at the market established by the refugees located at the camp entrance. Both Ghanaians and Liberians have set up businesses in and around the camp, promoting economic growth in what was once a quiet rural village.

Host government responses

41. Before the 1990s, Ghanaian asylum policy was largely influenced by Nkrumah's pan-Africanist foreign policy adopted by the regime at independence. Advocating the cause of African liberation and unity, Ghana took in southern African refugees and the president took direct interest in their welfare. However, with the overthrow of Nkrumah's government, succeeding governments showed less interest in political refugees from independent African countries. But as signatories to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1969 OAU Convention governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, Ghana continued to grant asylum to southern African students who attended secondary and technical schools and the University of Ghana. As of June 1985, there were 175 officially recognized refugees in Ghana of whom 72 were students.¹⁴

42. Accustomed to dealing with smaller numbers of political refugees, Ghana was unprepared to handle the large influx of Liberian refugees that began to arrive in 1990. Recognizing the need for national legislation to guide dealings with refugees, Law 305, which came into effect on 27 August 1993, established the Refugee Board as the official government counterpart of UNHCR in Ghana with the responsibility to oversee government policy on refugee issues including refugee status determination.¹⁵

43. Of key importance to current confusion over Liberians' legal status in Ghana is the fact that they were given prima facie refugee status. In practice, it was UNHCR

¹⁴ Essuman-Johnson, *Ghana's Policy Toward Refugees*, 2001; Ghana Refugee Board, *Help Refugees Help Themselves: The Management of Refugees in Ghana*, Ghana, 1998, p. 15.

¹⁵ Ghana, PNDC Law 305 D, Part II, Establishment of the Refugee Board.

and not the government that registered Liberians as refugees at Buduburam Camp.¹⁶ The implications of this will be addressed later in the report.

44. To accommodate the refugees, the host government made land available at Buduburam in Gomoa District located about 40 minutes' drive east of Accra. The government expected that refugees would only be in need of temporary asylum so refugees were given usufruct rights to camp land with the understanding that at some point they would return home and the land would revert to the host government. Eleven years later, Liberians still remain at Buduburam and refugees interviewed expressed fear that the government may close down the camp and require them to move. The government has not indicated that it will do this, but the possibility lingers with the current uncertainty of Liberians' legal status in the country.

45. The National Mobilization Programme (NMP), a government organization responsible for disaster relief in Ghana, was given administrative responsibility for the camp and the Ghanaian police provide security. However, the government has not offered any material assistance, making it clear that they 'are overburdened with the challenge of hospitality for the thousands of refugees who entered the country'.¹⁷ Any such assistance for refugees has come through UNHCR and non-government sources.

46. While some Liberians settled on their own in Accra and a smaller number were assisted at Krisan Camp, Senzolli, the majority of Liberians remain at Buduburam. Unofficial estimates put the camp population at 15,000 to 20,000 if dependants of family heads are included in the count. Buduburam is not walled and people move freely in and out of the camp. Liberians are allowed complete freedom of movement in Ghana.

International community responses

47. From 1976 to 1990, the UNHCR office in Ghana existed as a Counselling Service to the Ghanaian government on matters concerning the relatively small number of refugees from southern Africa. In 1990, unable to meet the needs of the large influx of Liberian refugees, the Ghanaian government called upon UNHCR to offer material assistance, thus dramatically increasing UNHCR's operations in Ghana. At this time, the UNHCR Counselling Service became a Chargé de Mission.¹⁸

48. Under UNHCR's administrative direction, a variety of non-governmental organization (NGO) implementing partners began to assist Liberian refugees. Food rations were provided. Tents were distributed for shelter. The Ghana Red Cross set up a clinic, World Relief provided water and other aid organizations also participated in relief efforts. In general, the basic needs of Liberian refugees were met at the initial stages of their time in Ghana.¹⁹

¹⁶ Interviews, Accra, 5 September 2000 and 28 August 2001; Essuman-Johnson, *Ghana's Policy Toward Refugees*, 2001.

¹⁷ Ghana Refugee Board, *Help Refugees Help Themselves*, p. 20.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ E. Karnga, *The History of the Buduburam Refugee Camp*, Dissertation for a BA degree submitted to the Department of History, University of Ghana, Legon, 1997; Interview, Accra,

49. A primary school was established at the camp in October 1990 upon the initiative of the refugees themselves, but it lacked sufficient resources. When UNHCR began providing assistance, a local NGO called the Ghana Christian Council was the implementing partner responsible for supporting education at the camp. It oversaw the building of new classrooms, provided a small stipend for teachers and periodically distributed school materials. But in general the refugees were left to run the school themselves. By 1991 a junior high school had been added, and in 1996 Buduburam Secondary School, known as BuduSec, opened.

50. In 1993 the International Rescue Committee (IRC) began vocational skills training. Refugees were taught construction, carpentry, sewing and community health. They also learned soap making and for a time UNHCR purchased soap from the refugees to distribute for redistribution in the camp. Unfortunately, the soap factory was closed down due to mismanagement of funds. Refugees expressed gratitude for skills learned from the IRC. Some have opened businesses using skills they acquired from the training received.

51. Also in 1993 UNHCR initiated an agriculture and micro-loan programme in an attempt to promote refugee self-reliance. Refugees and UNHCR staff alike agreed that these programmes had very little impact on the community for the following reasons.

52. Limited land availability and poor soil conditions made it impossible for refugees to sustain themselves on agriculture alone. As a result, refugees generally purchased most of their food from nearby markets, although some supplemented their diet with vegetables grown in gardens surrounding the camp.

53. The loan programme was terminated by 1998 because loans were not repaid as expected. UNHCR Ghana said that the majority of refugees used the loans for consumption rather than investment purposes. Refugees said that only a few people benefited from the loans and the behaviour of some spoiled others' opportunities. Refugees also complained that loan funds were misappropriated by those managing the programme.²⁰

54. After elections were held in Liberia in 1997, it was assumed that conditions in Liberia had improved sufficiently enough to allow for repatriation. From 1997 to 1999, UNHCR Ghana shifted its focus from care and maintenance to voluntary repatriation. Material assistance was significantly reduced to all but the most vulnerable refugees and 3,597 Liberian refugees were assisted to repatriate.²¹ However, according to UNHCR Ghana and Ghanaian government sources

18 August 2000. Old case load refugees interviewed often made references to the fact that they received aid, but most spoke in general terms no longer recalling the specific details of which organisations provided what and when.

²⁰ Unfortunately, it was not possible to interview those who ran the programme, thus information about the programme was limited.

²¹ UNHCR, The Voluntary Repatriation Statistics Summary for West Africa, 17 May 1997 to 4 September 2000.

interviewed, significant numbers of repatriated Liberians returned to Ghana, and as such the camp population has not reduced significantly.²²

55. By June 2000 all UNHCR assistance was withdrawn to Liberian refugees including vulnerable refugees as part of a UNHCR regional policy.²³

Refugee responses to assistance received

56. When refugees first arrived, many were exhausted and sick from harrowing journeys by land and sea. In their first months in exile, refugees focused upon securing their most basic needs for food, shelter, water and medical care, which were provided by UNHCR and its implementing partners.

57. Gradually, Liberian refugees themselves became involved in relief efforts by setting up community- or camp-based organizations (CBOs). Entirely upon their own initiative, refugee leaders organized, managed and raised funds for them. Through CBO projects, refugee volunteers were mobilized for such activities as planting trees around the camp, sanitation, building homes for the elderly, and managing a poultry project.²⁴

58. Gradually the camp took on the appearance of a permanent town rather than a makeshift refugee camp. When tents provided for shelter began to rot, UNHCR and the Ghanaian camp management encouraged refugees to build more permanent structures using the brick-making skills that they had been taught in vocational schools. The refugees provided the labour and purchased cement needed for the foundation. Aid agencies provided wood and nails for framing doors and windows and felt (canvas-like material) for roofing.

59. Refugees considered UNHCR assistance in the early 1990s to have been an important resource in their efforts to survive, albeit insufficient to meet all their needs. Liberians resorted to selling their food rations and sought wage labour in order to acquire money necessary for purchasing provisions to supplement what they were given.

60. A Liberian refugee can work legally in Ghana if he or she applies for a work permit. Unfortunately while work permits are readily available, jobs are not.²⁵ Because unemployment is high in the host economy, relatively few Liberians have found employment in the formal sector. As a result, most refugees have turned to the informal sector. Those who get jobs in construction and other labour intensive jobs complain that they are paid less than Ghanaians. Many refugees instead prefer to sell goods and services in Buduburam Camp and its environs. Over time a variety of shops, restaurants and businesses have emerged, providing income-generating opportunities for refugees.

61. Remittances received from friends or relatives in the US have played a key role in enabling Liberians to invest in businesses. In addition, many Liberians

²² Interviews, Accra, 15 and 18 August 2000 and 5 September 2000; IRIN, 'News Bulletin', Abidjan, 2001.

²³ Interviews, Accra, 18 August 2000 and Geneva, 12 January 2001.

²⁴ Karnga, *The History of the Buduburam Refugee Camp*, pp. 60-61.

²⁵ Interview, Accra, 9 September 2000.

depend on relatives or friends in the US to help them in emergencies such as when extra health or education expenditures come up. Liberian social networks in the US - a product of historical linkages - have been reinforced by the resettlement programme.

62. The telephone business at the camp illustrates the importance of remittances. Communication centres and mobile phones are ubiquitous at Buduburam, and more are added all the time.²⁶ Those managing the centres report that the overwhelming majority of calls are made to and received from the US. In addition, more Liberians use email to communicate with friends and relatives abroad. So far no one has opened an email business at the camp so refugees frequent internet cafes in Accra.

63. Not all Liberians benefit from remittances to the same extent. Those who have no one in the US are at a clear disadvantage and must find other means of survival. However, the sharing of resources is common. If one person has enough for today, he or she shares it with a needy friend or neighbour with the understanding that the favour will be reciprocated later on when the tables turn. Liberians manage to survive one way or the other and even if they do not receive remittances directly, they benefit indirectly in that remittances fuel the camp economy.

Refugee responses to the withdrawal of assistance

64. The withdrawal of assistance to Liberians in Ghana brought about surprisingly few changes to the refugee population in June 2000. This is largely due to the fact that aid to all but the most vulnerable refugees had been significantly reduced by 1996 so they had already found alternative ways of coping.

Community-based organizations

65. Although international NGOs have followed UNHCR's lead by withdrawing their assistance to the camp, refugees continue to establish CBOs and raise funds abroad for community projects. For example, one CBO run by refugees feeds about 200 orphans and children of single parents per day. Another CBO offers sewing and computer classes at reduced rates, and sponsors the education of war orphans. Many of these projects have made a positive impact on the community, demonstrating the Liberian refugees' capacity for self-help.

66. However, idealistic notions of local capacity to meet local problems should be tempered with an understanding that very often within the refugee community itself the strong and influential take advantage of the weak. For example, it is reported that while the original organizations did good work in the early 1990s, as time went by funds were misappropriated and for various reasons projects ceased. Funds for these projects were usually raised through proposals sent to donors abroad and tended to raise a lot of money since donors were easily attracted to refugee efforts to assist their own people. Concerns were raised that new CBOs currently

²⁶ When research was conducted in 2000, there were ten communication centres in the camp, six owned by Ghanaians and four by Liberians. Several more had been opened by September 2001.

springing up are often scams that allow the proposal writer to raise money in the name of assisting people with little or no monitoring to ensure that projects are implemented.

Food

67. The phasing out of food assistance had relatively little impact on the refugee community largely because from the outset Liberians looked to other sources to supplement their food rations. These sources included gardening, trading rations for other products and purchasing food in nearby markets. When food rations were cut for all but the most vulnerable refugees in 1996, refugees adjusted to the new circumstances by relying completely on these alternative sources. Refugees generally eat an adequate diet of rice and greens, their staple foods, and malnutrition is not a big problem at the camp.

Water

68. Of greater concern to the refugees was the withdrawal of water from the camp in 1996. Apparently, taps were left on continuously making UNHCR unwilling to foot the water bill. In addition, water pipes were not well maintained and broke. As a result, water to the camp was eventually shut off. Refugees responded by hiring Ghanaians to bring water to the camp in trucks. The water was then stored in reservoirs built or storage tanks purchased by refugees and then resold. Although Liberians at the camp complain about being required to purchase water, the system works efficiently and provides income to refugees engaged in the water business.

69. While many refugees can afford to purchase water, water problems persist for the minority without sufficient funds. These people are forced to use dirty water from a few ponds and wells that exist near the camp. Purified drinking water sold in small plastic bags is readily available, but again those without money to buy it do not benefit. As a result, sicknesses caused by contaminated water continue to be a problem.

Health care

70. The camp clinic was closed at the beginning of 2000 because the implementing partner responsible for refugee health care since 1994, the Assemblies of God Development and Relief Agency, was unable to maintain it when UNHCR financial support was withdrawn. Qualified Liberians with experience working in the camp clinic requested the Ghanaian government to be allowed to continue operating the clinic. However, they were not authorized to do so since government policy requires that Ghanaians be in charge of all medical institutions. In addition, the government does not recognize Liberian medical credentials. In order to practice in Ghana, health professionals must attend training workshops and meet Ghanaian standards. Health workers interviewed said they did not have sufficient funds to pay for these workshops.

71. Efforts are currently being made by the Catholic Diocese to reopen the clinic, but disagreements with the Ministry of Health over who should be allowed to manage and staff the clinic have caused delays.

72. Remaining options for medical assistance currently available at the camp include the following. A private clinic run by the Lutheran Church is located just outside the camp; however, refugees interviewed considered it to be expensive and its lab results unreliable. Some Liberian nurses make house calls to the sick, or treat patients in unregistered house clinics on the camp. A number of Ghanaian-run pharmacies have also opened around the camp making basic medicines available to refugees.

73. For the most part, refugees go to Ghanaian hospitals in nearby Winneba and Accra for treatment. They complain of the distance they must travel to these hospitals and of poor service given them because of discrimination in favour of Ghanaian nationals.

74. The incidence of HIV in the camp is becoming another matter of concern. Refugees going to the US for resettlement are required to take an HIV test, yet no counselling or instruction is given to those who test positive. These people are not denied resettlement, but while they await departure they are left without professional support. Some refugees suggested that a social worker should be made available to counsel them and others in need of such services. During the 1990s refugees trained in community health gave STD and AIDS awareness training to students at the camp school and to various community groups. Thus local capacity to address the problem is available, but nothing has been done to utilize or mobilize that capacity since aid was withdrawn and UNHCR-funded community health programmes were terminated.

Sanitation

75. In most cases, Liberians keep the areas surrounding their houses very clean. However, public areas are not well maintained. As long as aid was being provided, refugee volunteers were given a stipend to take care of sanitation in public areas. But at some point in the 1990s money for these projects was withdrawn and camp sanitation has deteriorated. Refugees reported that in pre-war Liberia, publicly owned property was similarly ill-maintained, a practice that seems to have been transferred to the camp.

76. Toilets are particularly problematic. The ones built when refugees first arrived have not been maintained primarily due to public misuse. Instead, many Buduburam residents use the bush areas surrounding the camp as a toilet or they throw plastic bags used as a toilet into these areas. Prior to Liberians' arrival, the Ghanaian villagers used the bush as well but the large population increase has made this an unsustainable practice.

77. Some families have built their own private latrines and allow neighbours to use them, but many do not have this luxury since to build a toilet that will not collapse in the soil is beyond their means. A few Liberians were in the process of preparing a proposal to raise funds for building public latrines that would be maintained by charging user fees.

Education

78. When UNHCR withdrew funding in 2000, Christian Council, the implementing partner responsible for refugee education, was unable to continue assisting the camp school. As a result, the Liberians running the school decided to

charge school fees so that the school could continue as a self-sufficient institution. In addition, refugee school administrators registered with the Ghanaian Ministry of Education so that students would be eligible to take Ghanaian qualifying examinations at BuduSec without having to join students at a neighbouring Ghanaian school as was the practice before the 2000-2001 academic year.

79. The school principal reported that no BuduSec graduates have gone on to Ghanaian universities due to lack of funding and lack of interest. An indicator of the standard of education being received can be gauged by test results of BuduSec students who took the West African Examination Council Exam.²⁷

Year	Number of students who took the exam	Percentage who passed
1998	86	63%
1999	77	39%
2000	45	60%
2001	76	Results not available.

80. Low test scores in 1999 were attributed to the fact that resettlement interviews were being held at the same time exams were being taken. Students preferred to go to the resettlement interview rather than complete their exams. In 2000, the number of students taking the exam dropped to 45 because several students were resettled to the US. In other years, the pass rate seems low -- around 60 per cent -- suggesting that the standard of education provided is in need of improvement. However, Liberians say the camp school is of a higher standard than what is available to them currently in Liberia.

81. In the 2000-2001 academic year, attendance in the camp school grades one through twelve reduced from about 1,000 to approximately 900 students. This was attributed to the inability of some students to pay the fees. Nonetheless the problem of classroom overcrowding persists, with over 100 students per class. A larger facility is needed. In addition, only the teacher has access to books making teaching difficult.

82. Recently the school has benefited from assistance given by Western Union. A total of 110 desks were donated to BuduSec as a way to assist the community since Liberians collecting remittances from the US make up a large percentage of Western Union's clientele for money transfer services to Ghana.

83. In addition to the camp school, a proliferation of small private primary schools gives evidence to Liberians' ability to address the educational needs of their community. Refugee churches and individuals run these schools entirely on their own initiative, charging fees to maintain the school and to provide an income for the teachers. These schools are not recognized by the Ghana Ministry of Education, which appears to be of little concern to those administrating and those attending the schools.

²⁷ BuduSec School Records.

84. Vocational training schools being run by NGOs were stopped when aid was withdrawn. However, in 1999 a Liberian bishop opened the Agency for Holistic Evangelism and Development (AHEAD), which offers vocational training to high school graduates in construction, agriculture, business, community health and missions and evangelism. Approximately 500 students have been through the three-year programme, and 30 Liberian teachers with university degrees are employed. Unfortunately, reports from students are that teaching is sporadic and funding coming from the US to run the school is not properly managed.

85. A growing problem at the camp are restless youths that have no interest in attending school. One area of the camp, known as 'The Gap', is particularly notorious. The Ghanaian police routinely visit the area to curtail any illegal activity, but without much success. Imitating American style 'gangstas in the hood' these youths spend their days without much to do and get themselves into trouble from time to time. Some camp residents are concerned that they spoil the reputation of Liberians in Ghana, potentially giving the Ghanaian authorities a good excuse for closing down the camp. At present nothing is being done to address the problem.

Self-reliance

86. Based on information presented above, Liberian refugees have demonstrated that they are not simply victims in need of assistance, but are active agents capable of looking after their own needs and finding their own solutions. Can it then be automatically assumed that Liberian refugees are self-reliant? The answer to this question varies depending upon who is asked.

87. From the refugees' perspective, self-reliance means the ability to meet one's needs and wants (within reason) through gainful employment without assistance from other individuals or family members. Many Liberians, those who would not be considered 'vulnerable refugees' by UNHCR, would argue that they are not self-reliant but in fact dependent upon other sources of financial assistance. These sources include friends and neighbours in the US and at the camp.

88. In addition, refugee women are particularly susceptible to dependency on relationships with men as a way to sustain themselves financially and to access luxury items that they value. As a result, teen pregnancy is common at the camp, giving many young women the added burden of providing for a child thus perpetuating the need to be dependent on a boyfriend.²⁸

89. Liberians in Ghana point to the following factors as obstacles to attaining self-reliance.

- Lack of employment for the educated. When jobs are available Ghanaians are typically given priority. Those with contacts in the

²⁸ A UNHCR study on Sierra Leonean refugees in Guinea indicated that owing to hardship and the difficulties of arranging conventional marriages under exile conditions, some refugee women entered into financially profitable casual relationships. See T. Kaiser, *A beneficiary-based evaluation of UNHCR's programme in Guinea, West Africa*, UNHCR, Geneva 2001 (EPAU/2001/02).

Ghanaian community have an advantage, but most Liberians are not so lucky.

- Low wages paid for casual labour due to a surplus of labourers in the work force.
- Negative attitudes of Ghanaians towards Liberians. Liberians claim they are discriminated against as soon as Ghanaians hear their accent. Apparently Ghanaians refuse to buy from Liberian women who try to sell in Ghanaian markets. Liberians generally feel that Ghanaians are jealous of their more western lifestyle and their reputation for having greater access to wealth from remittances.
- Limited educational opportunities. Some Liberians have enrolled in Ghanaian schools and find them to be of a better standard than what is available in Liberia. However, many at the camp do not have the means to pay school fees. Those interested in attending Ghanaian universities are disadvantaged by having to pay international tuition rates.
- High cost of land and housing. Liberians who came to Ghana in the early 1990s were given usufruct rights to camp land where they built their houses so housing is not a big problem for them. But new arrivals must find money to rent housing in surrounding areas because the camp boundaries are fixed and there is no room for more houses. Rent is determined by the owner of the house and because demand for housing is high, supply is limited and it is well known that many Liberians have access to US dollars through remittances, higher rents are charged in areas surrounding Buduburam than is typical in other areas of Ghana.
- Gender inequalities. While some Liberian women hold leadership positions within the community in camp schools and churches, it appears that many women must rely upon men to meet their financial needs.

90. Host country nationals interviewed generally had one of two opinions. Ghanaians living near the camp argued that they should have been equally assisted along with Liberians because their needs were just as great. Now that aid has stopped, they want to be allowed to participate in the resettlement programme to the United States. Ghanaians interviewed in Accra observed that Liberians generally dress very well and frequent clubs, bars and restaurants. On the basis of these observations, they asserted that Liberians seem to be better off than most Ghanaians.

91. The host government's position, as expressed by two members of the Ghana Refugee Board, is that most refugees at Buduburam Camp are still in great need. UNHCR's decision to withdraw assistance was viewed as an excuse for UNHCR to dump the needs of refugees onto the host country. Already overstretched trying to meet the needs of their own nationals for employment and social services, the

government insists that it is unable to assist Liberian refugees and feels strongly that UNHCR should continue providing assistance to the refugees.²⁹

92. From UNHCR's perspective, it appears that while refugee self-reliance was considered, the more pressing matter leading to the decision to withdraw assistance to Liberian refugees was lack of funding due to donor fatigue and a need to use limited resources for emergency situations in other parts of West Africa.³⁰ UNHCR Ghana staff acknowledged that needs persist among vulnerable refugees and expressed regret at their inability to help due to lack of funds.³¹

²⁹ Interview, 5 September 2000 and 28 August 2001.

³⁰ Interview, Geneva, 12 January 2001.

³¹ Interviews, Accra, 23 and 28 August 2001.

Refugee protection and durable solutions

Assistance as protection or protection as assistance?

93. When refugees first began to arrive in Ghana, UNHCR sought to fulfil its protection mandate by offering assistance in the form of care and maintenance programmes. This form of assistance was viewed as the best way to provide protection until refugees could become self-reliant and allow UNHCR to withdraw assistance in order to focus more exclusively on legal protection. However, on the basis of UNHCR's initial programmes, the Ghanaian government was given the impression that refugee protection is directly linked to UNHCR assistance.³² In other words, while UNHCR views material assistance as a means to refugee protection, the Ghanaian government has come to view refugee protection as means to material assistance.

94. The importance of aid to refugee protection in Ghana can be seen in the following examples. In 1996 following a resurgence of conflict in Monrovia, the well publicized arrival of 1,559 Liberian refugees on the sinking *Bulk Challenge* ship came into Ghanaian waters but was initially denied entrance because the Ghanaian government was unable and unwilling to bear the financial burden of assisting the fugitives. Upon the United Nations Secretary-General's offer to make aid available to whichever country took in the ship, the Ghanaian government reversed its decision and called the ship back to Ghana offering asylum to the refugees on board and using the funds made available to meet their basic needs.

95. By contrast, in June 2001, another ship containing Liberians seeking asylum passed Ghanaian waters, but because no offers of aid were made the Ghanaian government refused to accept the refugees and the ship had to continue on to Nigeria.³³

96. The Ghanaian government responded to the failure of the repatriation programme and the withdrawal of assistance by re-evaluating Liberian refugee status claims.³⁴ No longer willing to consider all Liberians as *prima facie* refugees, from March to May 2000 the Ghana Refugee Board conducted a screening process at Buduburam.

97. Recognizing problems of donor fatigue and limited UNHCR funds, the government accepted that UNHCR could no longer provide assistance to all Liberians in Ghana, but they expect that UNHCR will continue to assist the 3,449 Liberian households that were granted refugee status in 2001.³⁵ As of September

³² Interview, 5 September 2000.

³³ Interview, Accra, 28 August 2001.

³⁴ Interview, Accra, 28 August 2001.

³⁵ Interviews, Accra, 23 and 28 August 2001.

2001, UNHCR Ghana had received funds to assist these refugees but no decision had been made regarding the usage of these funds.³⁶

Legal status

98. The confusion over Liberians legal status in Ghana stems from the Ghanaian government's failure to grant refugee status to individuals and families during the 1990s.³⁷ Old caseload refugees were registered by UNHCR and given ration cards that gave evidence of their *de facto* refugee status. But when food rations were withdrawn, ration cards were collected which meant refugees no longer had any documentation to prove that they were refugees. In addition, the NMP registered refugees on various occasions for administrative but not status determination purposes. Several refugees who arrived in Ghana before 1997 said they were never registered for one reason or the other so they never received UNHCR assistance.

99. By 2000, the Ghana Refugee Board had become increasingly concerned that Liberians were taking advantage of Ghana's liberal asylum policies. More specifically, the government is concerned that the resettlement programme has encouraged Liberian movement to Ghana. Liberian refugees in the United States can file for their family members to be resettled from Ghana. The government is appreciative of the United State's willingness to participate in this burden sharing effort. However, reports are that refugees in the United States file for family members who lived in Liberia throughout the war. These people are said to be coming now to Ghana specifically for resettlement, making the programme less popular with the government.³⁸

100. In addition, the government is aware that many Liberians travel freely between Ghana and Liberia on a daily basis. ECOWAS provisions allow for Liberians to be in Ghana for 90 days without visa permission.³⁹ However, because all Liberians in Ghana have been considered *de facto* refugees since 1990, these travellers to Buduburam blend in as refugees, indistinguishable from those who have lived at the camp for 11 years. The word 'refugee' seems to have taken on extra-legal implications denoting a social category applied to all Liberians in Ghana regardless of their official legal status.⁴⁰

101. The government's asylum screening process conducted in 2000 was meant to clarify exactly which Liberians remain eligible for refugee protection in Ghana.

³⁶ Interview, Accra, 23 August 2001.

³⁷ Interviews, Accra, 5 September 2000 and 28 August 2001; A. Essuman-Johnson, 'Ghana's Policy Toward Refugees', unpublished paper, Department of Political Science, University of Ghana, Legon, 2001.

³⁸ Interviews, Accra, 5 September 2000 and 28 August 2001.

³⁹ ECOWAS Protocol A/P.1/5/79, Relating to Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment, Part II, Article 3, No. 2.

⁴⁰ The matter of the refugee label emerging as a social category with extra-legal implications is not a new one. In his study of refugees in Cyprus, Zetter demonstrates the way in which refugees used their *de facto* status as a political tool to attract international attention and to access entitlements to housing (Zetter, R. (1991) "Labelling Refugees: Forming and Transforming a Bureaucratic Identity", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 4(1):39-62). It appears that a similar principle is at work among Liberian refugees who wish to access opportunities in Ghana for resettlement to the USA and other developed countries.

However, it appears that the matter of Liberian's legal status in the country has become more confused than ever for the following reasons:

102. Of approximately 9,000 family heads interviewed at Buduburam camp over a three-month period, 3,449 were granted refugee status by the Ghana Refugee Board. However, none of those interviewed has received a letter to inform them of the Board's decision either to grant or deny their claim. A list of the names of those granted refugee status was simply posted at the UNHCR office in Accra. Those not on the list were left to assume that they had been denied refugee status.

103. Approximately 500 family heads were not interviewed in one area of the camp because application forms ran out. In addition, the Refugee Board claims that refugees did not take the screening process seriously and sometimes missed scheduled interviews. A list of refugees not screened has been made, and the Refugee Board says they intend to interview these people and assess their claims in the near future.

104. The right to appeal exists in Ghanaian law⁴¹ but provisions for an appeals process were not in place as of September 2001. Recognizing that the Board is hard pressed to assess initial asylum applications, it seems unlikely that appeals would be processed quickly and efficiently.

105. Identification cards were supposed to be made and distributed to those granted asylum, but this has not yet been done. Apparently, the Board ran out of film while taking identification photographs of refugees. They will resume the preparation of identification cards when UNHCR provides them with more film.⁴²

106. As a result of the confusion over the screening process, many categories of Liberians currently reside at Buduburam Camp all of whom maintain de facto refugee status.

Future directions of host government policy

107. The government could technically require those denied refugee status to return to their country of origin. However, for now it appears that the government will allow Liberians to remain since the inevitable political and logistical problems of serving deportation orders to such a large number of people would be difficult to surmount. No mention has been made of an alternative status for Liberians who have been denied refugee status. Currently they remain in the country without legal permission.

108. There is talk of relocating Liberians granted refugee status to another area yet to be determined so that they can be assisted by UNHCR. This matter is surrounded by a great deal of controversy and Liberians are very much opposed to the idea preferring to maintain the status quo by remaining at Buduburam Camp

⁴¹ According to Ghana, Law 305D, Part III, No. 9(1), "any person who is aggrieved by a refusal of the Board to grant him a refugee status, may within 30 days of being notified of such refusal, appeal in writing to the Secretary".

⁴² Interview, Accra, 28 August 2001.

near Accra in their established homes. As a result, it is unlikely that the plan will be implemented.⁴³

109. The government has come to view Liberian refugees as a national security concern since riots erupted at the camp in March 2001. Police were deployed to stop the violence and 22 Liberians were imprisoned. Fears that Liberian rebels may have infiltrated the camp to instigate violence and bring Liberia's problems to Ghana led the Ministry of Interior to call for a thorough investigation of the events leading up to the riot.⁴⁴ As of September 2001, the suspects were still awaiting trial and while a police report was submitted, no investigation had been made.⁴⁵

110. President Kufour's new administration, elected into office in January 2001, planned to restructure the Ghana Refugee Board. As of September 2001 all decisions concerning Liberian refugees were on hold until a new Board could be appointed.⁴⁶

UNHCR's role in 2001

111. As of September 2001, UNHCR Ghana was focusing on legal protection for Liberian refugees. A UNHCR Protection Officer assigned to Ghana in March 2001 is responsible for overseeing the Eligibility Committee of the Refugee Board and training the Refugee Board.

112. Because the government has insufficient staff to process asylum claims, UNHCR has also taken on this responsibility. Currently the Protection Officer is available one morning per week to provide asylum counselling to Liberians who travel from the camp to UNHCR Accra. If the asylum-seeker appears to have a legitimate claim, he or she is given an application form signed by the protection officer. Forms are not provided to all for fear that the office will be inundated with applications.

113. Only refugees able to afford time away from their work and the cost of transportation to UNHCR's office in Accra are able to avail themselves of this counselling. As a result, it is often the most persistent refugees who apply for refugee status, not necessarily the most eligible.

114. More staff is needed to deal with the large number of asylum applicants. Ideally, the Ghanaian government should see to this but at the present this is not likely given the government's insistence on UNHCR involvement. Additionally, the opportunity to apply for asylum should be made accessible. Provisions for an appeals process also need to be put into place.

115. In addition, UNHCR is monitoring the case of the 22 Liberians arrested in connection with the March riots. It is seeking to ensure the suspects are given a fair trial and that they are given the same treatment in prison as Ghanaian prisoners.⁴⁷

⁴³ Interview, Accra, 23 August 2001.

⁴⁴ *Daily Graphic*, "Government Calls for Data on Refugees," Accra, 27 March 2001; Interview, Accra 28 August 2001.

⁴⁵ Interview, Accra, 28 August 2001.

⁴⁶ Interview, Accra, 28 August 2001.

⁴⁷ Interview, Accra, 23 August 2001.

Durable solutions

116. Given the present state of affairs in Ghana, what are the prospects for durable solutions? Obstacles to repatriation and integration will be discussed. Refugees' favoured solution -- resettlement to the United States -- will be further analysed. And the possibility of continued residence in Ghana will be explored.

Repatriation

117. Refugees interviewed seemed to think Liberia was safe enough to visit but not safe enough for a permanent return. Conditions are not so bad as to prevent many of them from making trips to visit Liberia, but reports from travellers to Liberia are not encouraging. Soldiers are said to be everywhere and civilians are routinely harassed.

118. According to international observers, extortion is widespread in all levels of society, and the government's human rights record remains poor. Officials have little or no accountability or transparency, further exacerbating the divisions and resentments fuelled by the war. Security forces act without government authority and harass civilians at will. The Krahn and Mandingo ethnic groups that opposed Taylor during the war are particularly susceptible to harassment at the hands of the state security apparatus. In addition, violence persists in Lofa County, where residents are susceptible to attacks made by Liberian rebel forces operating from Guinea and Sierra Leone. Although not confirmed, the attacks were thought to be led by former rebel fighters from the ULIMO-K faction who were largely ethnic Mandingos.⁴⁸ Given these conditions, Liberians' decision to remain in Ghana is understandable.

119. However, safety appeared to be just one of many factors refugees weighed in deciding whether or not to return home. Those attending school or with children enrolled were reluctant to interrupt the school year. In addition, those who had established businesses at the camp or had access to wage labour wanted to remain in Ghana. Some expressed a desire to go home but said they did not have transport money or the capital necessary for re-establishing their homes in Liberia. And finally, the possibility of resettling to the United States has kept many Liberians waiting hopefully in Ghana.

120. The resettlement programme was run in conjunction with the repatriation programme in the 1990s. It would appear that to run both programmes at the same time is counter-productive. Many Liberians interviewed said they decided to delay plans to return home in order to pursue the possibility of going to the US.

Integration

121. Several options for local integration are open to Liberians. They include the following:

- Naturalization.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch, World Report, 2001.

⁴⁹ According to Law 305 D, Part IV, No. 14 on Naturalization, 'Subject to the relevant laws and regulations relating to naturalization, the Board may assist a refugee who has satisfied

- Permission for an extension of stay as ECOWAS citizens.⁵⁰
- Ghanaian citizenship through marriage to a Ghanaian national.⁵¹

122. While integration in these ways may be a legal possibility, Liberians interviewed cited a number of practical difficulties involved in pursuing these options. First, they claimed that as foreigners they felt discriminated against in Ghana's legal systems and that corruption and inefficiency made application for legal status laborious and frustrating.

123. Second, Liberians interviewed at Buduburam claim that Ghanaian society and the job market are closed to outsiders. While the government allows foreigners to work, Ghanaians typically hire other Ghanaians leaving Liberians with very few opportunities.

124. Third, it appears that West African understandings of citizenship are not based on civic rights but rather on primordial attachments to the land. Liberians might live in Ghana for 40 or 50 years, but they would continue to be viewed as foreign even if naturalized. Citizenship in West Africa is popularly understood to be something a person is born with and not something a government can bestow.

125. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, Liberians interviewed said they preferred to remain as refugees so that they could apply for resettlement to the United States. Integrating into the host system would mean losing the refugee label and the opportunities that it affords to them. Liberians see Ghanaians struggling to make ends meet and do not view integration into such an environment as a durable solution.

the conditions applicable to the acquisition of Ghanaian nationality to acquire Ghanaian nationality.'

⁵⁰ According to ECOWAS Protocol A/P.1/5/79 Relating to Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment, Part II, Article 3 (2) 'A citizen of the Community visiting any Member State for a period not exceeding ninety (90) days shall enter the territory of that Member State through the official entry point free of visa requirement. Such citizen shall, however, be required to obtain permission for an extension of stay from the appropriate authority if after such entry that citizen has cause to stay for more than ninety (90) days.'

⁵¹ According to The 1992 Constitution, Chapter Three on Citizenship, Article 7 (1) "A woman married to a man who is a citizen of Ghana or a man married to a woman who is a citizen of Ghana may, upon making an application in the manner prescribed by Parliament, be registered as a citizen of Ghana." Provisions are also made for children of one Ghanaian parent to become Ghanaian citizens. However, while provisions are being made for Ghanaian nationals to acquire a dual citizenship (W. Adu and A. Noretti, "Participants Hail Dual Citizenship, The Republic of Ghana website, 30 July 2001), it appears that nationals of other countries seeking to gain Ghanaian citizenship must drop their first citizenship. Article 8 (2) of the Constitution states that "A person who becomes a citizen of Ghana by registration and immediately after the day on which he becomes a citizen of Ghana is also a citizen of some other country, shall cease to be a citizen of Ghana unless he has renounced his citizenship of that other country . . ." In other words, it appears that Liberians who want to become Ghanaian citizens are not permitted to have dual citizenship in both Liberian and Ghana; they must drop their Liberian citizenship. Provisions for African Americans to obtain dual citizenship in Ghana are being discussed in what is known as the 'Law of Return' proposal (H. Aidi, "Ghana's Law of Return," *Africana*, 2001). It seems unlikely that Liberians will be eligible for dual citizenship under the same law since they are not 'returning home.'

Resettlement

126. The potential for repatriation and local integration seems to pale considerably in light of the durable solution Liberians want most: resettlement to the United States, and to a lesser extent Canada and other developed countries.

127. The US resettlement programme is a highly visible feature of camp life with resettlement interviews regularly scheduled and refugees leaving the country on a weekly basis. Throughout the 1990s Liberians were resettled either as Priority 1 (P1) refugees in need of political asylum or as Priority 3 (P3) refugees resettled for family reunification purposes.

128. As of 29 October 1999 UNHCR stopped receiving applications for P1 resettlement because the Ghana office was overwhelmed with an enormous backlog.⁵² Subsequently, UNHCR Ghana made the decision not to resume making P1 referrals to the US Immigration and Naturalization Service for Liberian refugees because they do not have sufficient staff to handle the number of applications expected.⁵³ As a result, now only Liberian refugees with family members in the US can apply for resettlement.

129. Since the March 2001 riots, all interviews for P3 resettlement have been conducted in Accra, rather than Buduburam, for security reasons. Clearly, those unable to travel to Accra are disadvantaged by the new arrangement.

130. At the time when research was conducted, all evidence seemed to point to an expanding US resettlement programme for Liberian refugees seeking family reunification. First, every year since 1992, the ceiling set in the US Congress for the number of African refugees to be granted admission has either remained the same or increased. Second, as of 2001, the US had established a resettlement processing office in Ghana in response to logistical complications and delays in processing claims through the centre in Kenya. The fact that a new processing office is needed suggests that the US government recognizes West Africa as having its own distinct refugee caseload and that they intend to resettle more refugees out of Ghana.⁵⁴

131. Refugees interviewed described the ways in which many refugees not eligible for resettlement manipulate the programme in order to get to the US. Reports are that people routinely join the programme by purchasing a space on the P3 affidavit of relationship under a different name or by paying to go as the dependent of someone already on the resettlement programme. In addition, some Ghanaians are willing to pay to join Liberian families in order to go to the US. UNHCR Ghana, the Joint Voluntary Agency, which processed P3 claims until recently, and other persons involved in administering the programme are well aware of these fraudulent tactics, but remain hopeful that refugees with legitimate need for resettlement will be the ones to make it through the application assessment process.⁵⁵

⁵² UNHCR Ghana memo, 25 October 1999.

⁵³ Interview, Accra, 23 August 2001.

⁵⁴ Interview, Accra, 30 August 2001.

⁵⁵ Interviews, Accra, 7, 11 and 18 August 2000 and 30 August 2001.

Residence in a Liberian enclave

132. From the host government's perspective, the resettlement programme is one of the primary reasons why Liberians continue to come to Ghana. However, from the perspective of Liberian refugees interviewed, even if the resettlement programme were to close tomorrow, they would choose to stay in Ghana as long as conditions in Liberia remain unsafe.

133. However it appears unlikely that staying in Ghana would translate into local integration. Liberians have established Buduburam as a home away from home and if allowed to stay, it is likely that it would remain as a Liberian enclave in Ghana.

Refugee perceptions and reflections

Refugee perceptions

134. As in any community, the perceptions of Liberians are many and varied. But an attempt has been made to summarize the issues most important to them.

On UNHCR responses

135. Liberians generally applaud UNHCR for the help given when they first arrived in Ghana. Many Liberians also benefited from vocational training. Some have established businesses as carpenters and found work as masons and builders using skills acquired through these programmes.

136. However, complaints were often made about mismanagement of assistance during the 1990s. Refugees reported that as time went on food rations and aid came sporadically. While assistance was supposed to be phased out by June 2000, refugees considered vulnerable did not receive any assistance after December 1999. These allegations are not substantiated, but it is important that refugee voices should be heard on this matter.

137. Refugees also complained that they were obligated to pay unofficial fees to purchase land if they wished to build within the camp and to open a shop for business on the camp.⁵⁶ The matter of usufruct rights to camp land is further complicated by the reality that refugees routinely charge rent to new arrivals for camp houses.

138. Refugees in general do not think it fair that UNHCR withdrew all assistance to them especially since Sierra Leonean refugees continue to receive help. Refugees repeatedly mentioned that they felt that Sierra Leonean refugees were favoured over them.

139. More frequent visits from UNHCR staff would be greatly appreciated in order for UNHCR to be better informed about the refugee living conditions. Refugees complained that UNHCR staff visit only when they give camp tours to official visitors.

140. Refugees interviewed requested that UNHCR should resume assistance by providing water, education and healthcare to the camp. Students were especially interested in scholarship opportunities for refugees. Some felt UNHCR should once again provide micro-loans for refugees to start businesses.

⁵⁶ One refugee's allegations were covered in the national press; see *Daily Graphic*, "Former Liberian MP Appeals to Government," Accra, 2000.

On security matters

141. Refugees interviewed expressed their confusion over what UNHCR protection means. Expecting UNHCR to protect them from any danger in Ghana, refugees were frustrated at the failure of UNHCR and the Ghanaian police to intervene in the events leading up to the March 2001 riots. Although the Ghanaian government views the riots as evidence of a national security threat, Liberian refugees interviewed trace the origin of the rioting to a need to protect their community. Apparently, when a series of stabbings occurred at the camp, the police failed to intervene and letters were sent to the UNHCR Ghana office requesting that something be done, but no response was given.

142. While Liberians have generally felt safe in Ghana, a great deal of concern has arisen in response to what happened in March. The Ghanaian police shot into the air to dispel the rioting crowd and one woman was injured by a stray bullet. Some Liberians who have not been granted refugee status expressed fear that the riots at the camp would give the Ghanaian government a good excuse to send them back to Liberia.

On resettlement

143. Liberian refugees in Ghana want more resettlement. They feel UNHCR should resume making P1 asylum referrals for Liberians to the US resettlement programme so they are not limited to P3 family reunification resettlement. They also want UNHCR to find other developed countries to take in Liberian refugees.

On refugee status in Ghana

144. In September 2000, little was said about applying for refugee status in Ghana. However, over the last year the issue has become a primary concern for Liberians. Recognizing that their claim to refugee status is in question, many Liberians are adamant that they should be granted refugee status by the Ghanaian government since they do not consider conditions in Liberia to be suitable for their return.

145. However, many Liberians are frustrated that while being given refugee status in Ghana may make a difference legally, it changes nothing practically. Those granted status have no apparent advantages over those who have not been granted it. No one receives aid and no one has been sent home. In addition, non-refugees have the same economic and social rights in Ghana as registered refugees.

146. Nonetheless, many Liberians are anxious to get refugee status just in case the time comes when having it becomes important. Refugees interviewed believed that being granted refugee status in Ghana could potentially enhance their opportunities for getting scholarships abroad and could make them more eligible for resettlement.

Reflections

147. Refugee protection is the heart of UNHCR's mandate, yet it appears that long-term care and maintenance programmes have the potential to jeopardize that protection if the host government's willingness to offer asylum becomes linked to

obtaining UNHCR financial assistance for refugees. Certainly material assistance is an important part of refugee protection at the initial stages of a refugee crisis. However, UNHCR needs to make it crystal clear that refugee protection rests upon the principle of *non-refoulement* and not upon the provision of food, shelter and medical care. If UNHCR's decision to withdraw material assistance leads to *refoulement* or an unwillingness to allow asylum-seekers at sea to avail themselves of the host country's protection then UNHCR has failed to fulfil its mandate.

148. So far, such a terrible scenario has not played itself out in Ghana and the Ghanaian government is upholding its responsibility to provide asylum to Liberian refugees. However, the ambiguous nature of Liberians' current legal status in the country suggests that refugee protection is in an uncertain state due to government expectations of UNHCR assistance as a precondition for offering asylum.

149. It appears that while granting de facto refugee status to a large influx of refugees may be necessary at first, as the situation becomes protracted, refugee claims need to be assessed on an individual or familial basis. It is necessary to determine who is and who is not eligible for refugee protection and for programmes intended to facilitate durable solutions to refugee problems.

150. In regard to facilitating refugee self-reliance, the simple analogy of the treatment for a broken leg is instructive. When a person breaks her leg, she initially needs crutches. But after some time it is healthy and necessary to put away the crutches and walk on the leg even if it is a bit painful at first. This is the only way to foster healing. Likewise, UNHCR acted as a necessary crutch to Liberian refugees who needed assistance when they first arrived. But it seems that withdrawing assistance has enabled Liberians to walk on their own though it is a more painful process for some than for others.

151. UNHCR seems to function on the assumption that projects must be undertaken to facilitate refugee self-reliance. A more accurate working assumption asserts that refugees are intrinsically self-reliant survivors and capable individuals. In the situation under review it appears that UNHCR's continued provision of assistance over a period of ten years encouraged self-reliant refugees to act as if they were dependent. It should then come as no surprise that programmes meant to facilitate Liberian self-reliance failed to work effectively because they were in fact part of the problem. The most effective 'programme' for facilitating self-reliance appears to have been the termination of care and maintenance programmes.

152. After 11 years in Ghana, Liberians have moved beyond the problems they first faced after fleeing the war in their country. Now they experience the unfortunate problems of underdevelopment in the host environment in which they live, problems not all that different from those they faced in Liberia before the war. Those who advocate ongoing care and maintenance programmes need to consider that UNHCR's obligation is to seek permanent solutions to refugee problems. The organization was not intended to take on all the problems of African underdevelopment.

153. When an influx of refugees arrives in a host country and initial needs are great, the tendency is for UNHCR to assume that they are the sole support available to assist. This may be true at the initial stages, but as time goes by inevitably refugees begin to develop their social networks and seek other avenues to improve

their situation. UNHCR should guard against having an over inflated sense of its role in sustaining people in protracted refugee situations.

154. Consideration should be made for the way in which UNHCR contributes to the perpetuation of protracted refugee situations. Because a refugee establishment is in place to accommodate Liberians in Ghana, they are able to maintain the refugee label regardless of its validity. One would think that being a refugee in Africa puts one at a disadvantage. And this may be the case when refugees must flee to remote areas devoid of resources, or when the host country is not at peace. But in Ghana where conditions are peaceful and where Liberians have had several years to re-establish themselves, to be a refugee gives one many advantages over local residents. During the 1990s doors to international assistance were open to them and now the resettlement programme continues to be an option. It is little wonder that Liberians wish to remain in Ghana to access the advantages that come with the refugee label.

Applicability to other situations

155. Certainly not all refugees will have the same advantages that Liberian refugees have. Therefore, it should not be assumed that all refugee populations would be able to cope as well with the withdrawal of assistance. The following factors have been important to Liberians ability to survive in Ghana on their own:

- complete freedom of movement;
- close proximity to an urban centre;
- the freedom to exercise their social and economic rights; and,
- access to remittances through well-developed social networks in the US.

156. Each refugee population should be assessed on a case-by-case basis to discern what resources refugees rely upon to supplement assistance provided. Special attention should be focused on understanding how refugees build upon existing networks and use old coping mechanisms in new ways in a new environment. It is likely that over time the balance of greater reliance on aid can be shifted to greater reliance on these other coping mechanisms.

Conclusion

157. Spending time within the refugee community talking with individuals, groups, leaders and followers is essential if UNHCR wants to adequately address their needs. Blueprint responses may be adequate at the initial emergency stages but as the situation becomes protracted, UNHCR should make an effort to understand why the situation has become protracted before crafting a response.

158. UNHCR has expertise in dealing with humanitarian crises and can and should assist host countries in meeting the needs of refugees when they first arrive. However, care and maintenance programmes cannot go on forever. UNHCR cannot fix all the problems that refugees face in a protracted situation and in trying to do so it risks creating more problems than it solves. Responses that were intended to facilitate solutions appear to breed dependency, corruption and unrealistic expectations about what UNHCR can do for refugees. As long as UNHCR is willing

to fund various programmes, recipients will seek ways to meet the criteria necessary for receiving that aid. Unfortunately, it is usually the neediest people who lose out.

159. Refugees in Africa are locked into the wider problems of the continent. The development dimensions of refugee situations in countries of asylum cannot be ignored. The involvement of international development organizations in refugee situations would be a step in the right direction. However, while external agents may offer some assistance, it is likely that lasting solutions will only come about upon the initiative of the refugees themselves.

160. Finally, and most importantly, refugee protection must remain the foremost priority in all UNHCR responses. Care and maintenance programmes may be a part of fulfilling UNHCR's protection mandate, but they should not overshadow the agency's responsibility to protect refugees from refoulement, to ensure that refugees enjoy a safe environment within the host country, to offer legal assistance to asylum-seekers and to rigorously promote durable solutions to refugee problems.

Annex I – Terms of reference

Background: the protracted refugee situations initiative

UNHCR has launched an initiative designed to better meet refugee needs through improving the way in which the organization responds to protracted refugee situations. The first phase of this initiative consists of taking stock of UNHCR's experience with protracted situations with a view to analysing these experiences, and capturing any lessons that might be of general relevance.

Broadly speaking, the questions being asked are: How have UNHCR and others responded to protracted refugee situations, which of these responses have worked and which have not, and what elements of the successful responses can be applied to current and future protracted situations?

Details of the protracted refugee situations initiative are indicated in the annexed framework document.

Ghana as a protracted refugee situation

UNHCR has been involved with Liberian refugees in Ghana since the 1990s, when there were as many as 20,000 in the country. Their number is now estimated at some 9,000, mostly located at Gomoa Buduburam camp. UNHCR phased out assistance to this group in June 2000, in line with a regional policy. Thus, Ghana appears to represent a case in which UNHCR has been successfully able to withdraw from a long-term refugee situation.

The Ghana will case study will explore the general issues raised in the PRS initiative as they pertain to Ghana. In particular, it will examine the issue of refugee self-reliance: how have they arrived at this stage, what actions and actors were most effective in enabling self-reliance, and what prospects are there for durable solutions.

Generic report elements

The report should not exceed 25 pages (excluding summaries and annexes) and must be accompanied by a summary of findings, and recommendations. A format guide may be obtained from EPAU.

Background

Historical context (reasons for flight, composition of caseload, size of caseload, initial responses, evolution of situation, characteristics of situation (e.g., encamped, dispersed, urban)).

Asylum climate (host government policies (theory and practice); host community attitudes): are refugees permitted freedom of movement? access to labour markets/agricultural land? are there tensions between refugees and local populations? are there vested interests in favour of, or against, the refugee presence?

In what way might the situation be termed protracted? Is it a function of time, or does it have to do with the status of the refugees, and the inability of UNHCR responses to keep up with essential refugee needs?

Responses

How have various groups – refugees, host communities, host governments, UNHCR, other UN and other actors responded to the refugees? Have the responses been successful? How does one define ‘successful’ in the absence of a durable solution?’

(More detailed elements of this important section are indicated in the framework document)

Analysis

What stands out about the situation under review (e.g. host government policies, the importance of ethnicity, the lack of handover options)?

What lessons may be derived from the experience, and which ones could be used in other contexts?

What are some areas that need further exploration?

Methodology

The study will be undertaken using standard EPAU procedures: literature review, extensive field visits and interviews, field-level debriefing. The evaluator will be expected to consult with large numbers of refugees, and to account for the views of refugee women.

The in situ debriefing is considered to be an essential element of a UNHCR evaluation. The evaluator is expected to present his or her preliminary findings and recommendations to UNHCR stakeholders. This provides the evaluator with an opportunity to test the credibility of his or her findings, to assimilate new information where relevant, and to defend recommendations where appropriate.

Schedule

20 August to 5 September: field work in Ghana

10 September: submission of initial findings

21 September: submission of first draft of report for comments

A mission to Geneva will be scheduled for a later date.

Evaluation team

Ms Shelly Dick, an independent researcher, will undertake the study. EPAU will provide guidance, administrative support and funding. LO Ghana will assist with camp visit clearance, and will provide substantive inputs during interviews, the debriefing, and in comments on the report.

Principles

EPAU is committed to undertaking innovative research on UNHCR programmes in line with its Mission Statement objectives of transparency, independence, consultation and relevance. All evaluation reports are placed in the public upon finalization.

17 August 2001

Annex II – Persons consulted

UNHCR Ghana: Mariam Moller, Fredoline Tepe-Mensah, Adama Wurie

Ghana Refugee Board: E.Q. Blavo, Abdulai Buwumia

National Mobilisation Programme: Edwin Agypong

US Refugee Processing Center: Carla Nadeau

Christian Council of Ghana: Christian Akumiah

In addition, the evaluation contains information obtained from numerous ‘ordinary Liberian refugees’ who shared their insights and opinions in one-on-one discussions and group interviews. Approximately half of those interviewed were refugee women.

Several Ghanaians in the village near Buduburam Camp were also interviewed including representatives of the village chief. Informal interviews with Ghanaians in Accra also informed the study.

The members of the humanitarian community that provided assistance to Liberians during the 1990s were no longer around to offer their insights. However, a few Liberians and Ghanaians who worked with aid organizations remain in the Buduburam community, and they were consulted for the study.