

SIERRA LEONE

INITIAL OBJECTIVES

- Facilitate, and later promote, in conditions of safety and dignity, the voluntary return of 50,000 Sierra Leonean refugees and 50,000 internally displaced returnees, temporarily assisted in safe areas, to their places of origin. Provide assistance in their places of origin.
- Monitor the situation and provide information on actual security and living conditions in places of origin to Sierra Leonean refugees in countries of asylum and to those returnees who have not yet been able to return. In close co-operation with the Government and other partners, set up monitoring mechanisms to ensure physical safety and improved living conditions for returnees.
- Promote the enactment by the Government of national legislation, as well as the adoption of legislative procedures for refugee issues, including status determination.
- Provide Liberian refugees (old caseload), who still need international protection, with opportunities to achieve long-term solutions through local integration, naturalisation and resettlement.
- Provide protection and assistance to newly arrived Liberian refugees.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS, PROGRESS ACHIEVED, AND CONSTRAINTS

Sierra Leonean Returnees

The disarmament and demobilisation process was brought to a successful conclusion in January 2002 for more than 75,000 combatants. Following elections held in May, the security situation improved throughout Sierra Leone, and access to parts of the country previously controlled by rebel

factions became possible. By June 2002, all but eight of the 150 administrative chiefdoms were declared “safe for resettlement” by the Inter-Agency Assessment Committee of which UNHCR is a part.

Some development actors, such as the World Bank and the EU, began recovery and development work in the sectors of education and health. However, to keep pace with the rate of returns, increased co-operation among all agencies involved was required, to avoid a gap between the delivery of relief and development assistance.

Worsening security in Liberia prompted the return of Sierra Leoneans and created an influx of some 30,000 Liberian refugees in two main districts. This further complicated UNHCR’s ability to respond to their needs. Two field offices previously envisaged for voluntary repatriation operations had to begin border monitoring and organisation of convoys to refugee camps, often at the expense of returnee monitoring, due to inadequate resources. Given the lack of adequate resources to support these activities in existing budgets, funds were ‘borrowed’ from reintegration budgets. UNHCR could not properly respond with community-based, multi-sectoral reintegration activities as planned.

Despite the challenging operational environment, UNHCR continued to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of 44,410 refugees. Assistance to returnees included a two-month food ration (provided by WFP) and packages provided by UNHCR, comprising plastic sheets, kitchen sets, blankets, jerry cans, mats, tarpaulins, lamps and soap. Sanitary items for women were also provided. Another 11,850 spontaneous arrivals were registered in areas of origin. This group received support from community-based activities. Additional way

stations were established in Port Loko and Zimmi and reception points were added. Field offices opened in Kailahun and Zimmi, and were staffed with personnel on mission. From January to June 2002, the office in Kono was transformed from a tented compound to a more solid structure, and the sub-office in Kenema received additional staff.

Transit centres were established near Freetown in 2001 for 7,400 persons, who were encouraged to return to their places of origin. By the end of June 2002, 4,700 of them were still in transit centres. In the meantime, care and maintenance activities continued for Sierra Leonean returnees in temporary settlements in Jembe, Gerihun, Taiama and Bandajuma. However, these sites were progressively adapted to accommodate more refugees. Alternative returnee accommodations in Lokomasama were phased out with 6,600 remaining in Barri cheifdom at the end of June 2002 (reduced from a population of 16,000 in both host communities in January 2002). Nearly 27,000 returnees were internally re-located leaving 12,700 in temporary accommodation arrangements. Support to communities hosting returnees was provided through projects in agriculture, water and sanitation, health and education. These communities benefited considerably from the temporary presence of returnees.

The Government's capacity to handle returnee issues was increased through the funding of 30 staff from a national commission, as well as through the provision of vehicles, communications, office equipment and training. Another 20 implementing partners were engaged for various activities. Support structures such as the child protection network organisations and victims of violence programmes that provide assistance to vulnerable persons were expanded. UNHCR also employed a full-time gender specialist.

Environmental protection and management activities were carried out by a specialist

NGO, which addressed environmental education and awareness raising of environmental issues, community tree-planting programmes, and the promotion of fuel efficient "eco-stoves." Furthermore, efforts were made for all implementing partners to take environmental issues into consideration.

Reintegration activities focused on the main districts of return of Kambia, Kono and Kailahun. However, some outstanding projects for schools, community services, agriculture and skills- training were also completed in Pujehun District. Health clinics were rehabilitated and health services provided in 26 clinics (staff, equipment and drugs). Reproductive health services were extended through 10 clinics by a national NGO in Kono, and support was given to supplementary and therapeutic feeding centres in Kailahun and Kenema. The construction of eight schools was completed, five others were rehabilitated, and an additional four education inspector's offices were started. In addition, more than 40 temporary schools were built. Agricultural support reached more than 10,000 vulnerable farm families with 7,000 tonnes of rice and groundnut seeds.

Micro-credit loans and savings services were extended to more than 2,000 persons. Returnee protection monitoring was carried out both in temporary sites and in areas of origin. In areas of origin, UNHCR worked closely with the authorities and other agencies in initiatives to help returnees recover their property and facilitate family tracing and reunification. Community services activities included trauma healing, skills training and counselling for 525 women, survivors of sexual violence with psychological, medical and legal assistance, as well as self-reliance/income generation initiatives. 84 water points and wells, 522 community and family latrines, as well as showers and other sanitation facilities were constructed in returnee areas and temporary settlements. More than 30 rural communities were assisted in Kono and Kailahun districts.

Several projects designed jointly with development actors to rehabilitate the education sector were embarked upon. A joint reintegration scheme for 19 communities in Kono and Kailahun districts is underway and UNHCR supported the Sierra Leone Information System (SLIS) - another joint project for mapping and data management to help humanitarian and recovery activity co-ordination. Mass information activities through public meetings and videos were used in areas hosting Sierra Leoneans in the region in order to enable them to make free and informed decisions about returning home.

As a follow-up to the UNHCR/ Save the Children (UK) study on sexual exploitation in the Mano River Union sub-region, prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) was increased. The Co-ordination Committee on Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse established an inter-agency standards of accountability to govern the conduct of all humanitarian workers and community reporting systems. UNHCR and its implementing partners formulated a plan of action to minimise the risks of exploitation and abuse in every sector of refugee/returnee operations.

The positive developments prompting the return of Sierra Leoneans strained UNHCR's ability to respond. More transportation resources and transport allowance cash grants had to be added to the programme to assist persons returning to areas, where the transport fleet could not service. In previously rebel-occupied areas of return, the state of basic public and private infrastructure was found to be far worse than previously assumed. It was estimated that 10 per cent of current needs for all essential services (potable water, schooling) were being met in the return areas.

An adequate level of staffing was never attained, and offices came to rely constantly on short-term missions and emergency teams. Despite the commitment of

individuals, the lack of continuity of staff was problematic.

Delivery of international protection and returnee monitoring could not always be assured due to both staffing and security constraints in areas bordering Liberia. The slow return of civilian authority also contributed to difficulties ensuring protection in main areas of return. By the end of June 2002, eight chiefdoms of Kailahun district were yet to be declared "safe." UNHCR, could therefore, only facilitate transportation to certain "drop-off points" in "safe areas."

Liberian Refugees

Some 7,250 Liberian refugees, most of them urban refugees, have been in Sierra Leone since the early 1990s. A progressive deterioration in the security situation in Liberia resulted in an additional 26,000 arrivals. With another estimated 10,000 in the border areas of Kailahun and Pujehun districts awaiting relocation, the total number of Liberians in Sierra Leone at the end of June 2002 was over 43,250. In addition, the Government of Sierra Leone granted asylum and provided land for refugee camps through community negotiations.

Following consultations with the communities concerned, four existing temporary settlements for returnees were converted into fully-serviced refugee camps. Another refugee site at Jimi Bagbo was expanded and additional contingency sites were surveyed in Bo and Kenema districts. Construction has started on one of these sites at Gondama. Assistance was also provided for the return of 60 Guinean nationals who were abducted in their country and brought to Sierra Leone. UNHCR was instrumental in negotiating their release and facilitating their return to Guinea.

Although the refugee influx started in February 2002, it was only in late June 2002 that additional financial resources were made available. Between January and June 2002, resources were diverted from the repatriation

and reintegration budgets to service the most urgent and basic humanitarian needs. This constraint mainly impacted on the reintegration of Sierra Leoneans and made it difficult to raise assistance standards for refugees above bare basic levels, thereby increasing protection risks, such as the exploitation or recruitment of refugees in either the military or rebel forces.

Promotion of national legislation on refugee protection was made difficult given the state of flux and the priorities of the Government immediately prior to, and following elections in May 2002. These consultations have now been resumed.

The protection risks for the new arrivals are numerous. Thousands of refugees have sought refuge along the border in Kailahun and Pujehun districts. Fighting along the border areas and incursions into the Kailahun district resulted in the abduction of civilians. The Government's policy to move refugees

from border areas to camps required the continuation of mass information campaigns, in order to convince refugees to move rather than risk *refoulement* from the border areas.

A significant number of combatants sought asylum in Sierra Leone, but without their internment, there is no certainty that these individuals are genuinely and permanently demobilised. Many other young men sought asylum on the grounds of escaping conscription into the Liberian armed forces. There are suspicions that recruitment may be ongoing in the camps. Security screening is a Government priority and separate accommodation is being established in the camps for combatants. In some communities, growing tendencies towards xenophobia against Liberians, based on the perception that Liberians brought civil war to Sierra Leone, have led to fears that rebels and soldiers are intermingling in refugee influxes. This places genuine refugees at risk of discrimination and harassment.

Sierra Leonean Returnees

Progress as measured against indicators

Impact/Performance Indicators	Actual Progress
<p>Facilitate and later promote in conditions of safety and dignity, the voluntary return of 50,000 Sierra Leonean refugees and 50,000 internally displaced returnees temporarily assisted in safe areas, to their places of origin. Provide assistance in their places of origin.</p>	<p>No 'promotion' of voluntary repatriation started. Continued facilitated voluntary repatriation from Guinea and Liberia, with an emergency phase of repatriation from Liberia, due to the deteriorating security in Liberia since Feb. 2002.</p> <p>Voluntary return of 44,000 achieved from outside Sierra Leone, as well as 27,000 internally displaced (assistance including transport and non-food items provided to 71,000).</p> <p>Less than foreseen number of reintegration activities, due to budgetary constraints and competing operational priorities.</p>
<p>Monitor the situation and provide information on the actual security and living conditions of their places of origin to Sierra Leonean refugees in countries of asylum and to those returnees who have not yet been able to return to their areas of origin.</p> <p>In close co-operation with the Government and other partners, set up monitoring mechanisms to ensure the physical safety and improved living conditions for returnees.</p>	<p>Mass information campaigns continued. Information was provided to refugees on the prevailing situation in Sierra Leone as a whole, and the nature of the assistance provided by UNHCR. Informed voluntary nature of repatriation maintained.</p> <p>Limited progress on installing monitoring mechanisms or support to ensure the physical safety and improved living conditions for returnees. This is due to the slow restoration of civil authority in main returnee areas, and the general lack of UNHCR resources in terms of funding (required for the Liberian refugee programme).</p>

Liberian Refugees

Progress as measured against indicators

Impact/Performance Indicators	Actual Progress
Promote the enactment of national legislation and the adoption of legislative procedures for refugee issues, including status determination, by the Government.	Discussions reached an advanced level with the Minister of Foreign Affairs. However, further progress was hampered due to a change in Minister, government preoccupations with election issues, and limited protection staff being diverted to respond to the Liberian refugee emergency. Substantial amount of staff time and effort also required to respond to allegations of sexual abuse and exploitation by humanitarian workers.
Provide Liberian refugees (old caseload), who still need international protection with opportunities to achieve long-term solutions through local integration, naturalisation and resettlement.	As a result of the screening exercise from January to June 2002 under review, in addition to the provision of health care, only the most vulnerable refugees were assisted. Few long-term solutions were achieved largely due to lack of funding and delays in obtaining the deployment of resettlement staff.
Provide protection and assistance to newly arrived Liberian refugees.	Progress far outweighed expectations, as this need became the priority of operations during the first half of the year. Full services were provided (at the expense of drastically cutting the reintegration programme). 29,500 refugees provided for in camps with protection, to an additional 7,900 urban caseload.

REVISED OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITY ACTIVITIES FOR JULY-DECEMBER 2002

In view of the larger number of Sierra Leoneans repatriating earlier than foreseen, and the potential for bilateral aid:

- 100,000 total return planning figure is maintained, but revised to 35,000 internal movements and 65,000 external arrivals (progress to date 27,000 and 44,000 respectively).
- UNHCR will fund rapid temporary works (with less durable construction) to provide coverage, such as in temporary schools.
- Increase the Government's management of development activities such as construction of education offices and other training projects, so far undertaken by UNHCR and UNICEF.
- Increase efforts to foster coherence and continuity between humanitarian and development activities.

Liberian Refugees

The need to accommodate new refugees in specific camps was unforeseen. Revised objectives now include:

- Continued care and maintenance and full assistance for up to 75,000 refugees (old and new caseload).
- Maintaining contingency planning efforts with available sites and equipment for a total of 125,000 Liberian refugees.
- Developing a refugee policy and asylum infrastructure with the Government, including institutional and legislative capacity-building in protection and assistance. As part of an inter-agency effort, support the Government in establishing a separate regime for Liberian ex-combatants seeking asylum, once they have been genuinely and permanently demobilised.

Financial Data (USD)

Annual Programme Budget and Trust Funds				Supplementary Programme Budget			
Initial Budget	Revised Budget	Total Funds Available	Obligation Level	Initial Budget	Revised Budget	Total Funds Available	Obligation Level
14,959,111	21,130,546	14,225,369	10,731,723	0	3,713,541	322,922	250,000