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Reintegration
programmes for refugees
in South-East Asia

*Lessons learned from
UNHCR's experience*

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Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit

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Introduction

1. In the late 1980s, major changes occurred in South-East Asia. First, economic reforms initiated by the governments of Viet Nam, Cambodia, and Laos suggested that these countries were interested in developing broader trade relationships within the region. Second, the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia and Laos helped to ease political and military tensions in the region. One important result of these events was the initiation of talks that brought warring parties in the Cambodian civil war to the negotiating table for the first time. Chatichai Choonhaven, then Prime Minister of Thailand, reflected prevailing sentiments when he talked about changing the region from a battlefield into a market place.

2. A key sticking point complicating relations between Cambodia, Laos, Viet Nam, their regional neighbours, and many Western countries, was the unresolved issue of the Indochinese refugees then residing in various camps and detention centres throughout the region. The earlier approach, in which several Western countries agreed to take refugees in exchange for guarantees of safe haven in regional countries of first asylum, seemed to encourage additional migration. Moreover, many of the resettlement countries were becoming increasingly cautious about taking more refugees, thus leaving regional countries with large numbers of displaced people residing within their borders. By the late 1980s, it was clear to all parties concerned that a new approach was needed.

3. As a result, the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) was formulated and adopted by the International Conference on Indo-Chinese Refugees in Geneva in June 1989. The CPA was adopted by countries of origin (Laos and Viet Nam), regional countries of first asylum, and third countries of resettlement. Article 12 of the CPA stated that "persons determined not to be refugees should return to their country of origin in accordance with international practices reflecting the responsibilities of states towards their own citizens. In the first instance, every effort will be made to encourage the voluntary return of such persons."

4. In short, the CPA changed the rules of the game. Displaced persons were to be interviewed by UNHCR to determine their status as refugees. Those people who were "screened in" on the basis of a well-founded fear of political persecution were thereupon eligible for third country resettlement. Those 'screened out' (primarily because they were considered economic migrants) were to voluntarily repatriate - with UNHCR assistance - to their respective countries of origin. The screening process and eventual resettlement or repatriation was to be completed within a specified time frame according to a series of supplemental sub-agreements. For example, the Tripartite Agreement between Laos, Thailand, and UNHCR governed the Laotian repatriation process. Agreements between Viet Nam, various regional countries of first asylum, and UNHCR governed the Vietnamese repatriation process.

5. In Cambodia, meanwhile, the so-called JIM talks eventually paved the way for the Paris Peace Agreement in 1991. This agreement was signed by several Western and regional governments, and the four predominant political parties involved in the conflict. The Paris Peace Agreement stipulated - inter alia - that the United Nations would

organize and implement the voluntary repatriation of Cambodians then residing in the seven border camps in Thailand and from other countries of the region. The agreement also established the UN Transition Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC). Under UNTAC, UNHCR was designated as the lead agency to oversee and coordinate the repatriation and reintegration process. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Thailand, Cambodia, and UNHCR, signed in November 1992, governed the repatriation operation. Both the Paris Peace Agreement and the tri-partite MOU called for the voluntary return of all Cambodians in safety and dignity in time for them to participate in the national elections scheduled for May 1993.

6. The CPA and the Paris Peace Agreements, therefore, established the international, regional, and bilateral frameworks that reoriented regional migratory trends toward eventual repatriation to countries of origin. Over the next decade, the emphasis was on repatriating displaced people from camps throughout the region back to their countries of origin. The story is one of tremendous complexity and, generally speaking, remarkable success. In all, some 29,000 people repatriated safely to Laos, over 110,000 to Viet Nam, and over 360,000 to Cambodia in the 1992-93 operation. There was also a second operation in Cambodia in 1997-99 involving approximately 46,000 people who had fled to Thailand as a result of conflicts among various Khmer Rouge factions and different parties in the Cambodian government. Following repatriation, the focus of UNHCR's work in all three countries was on promoting sustainable reintegration outcomes through protection monitoring and support for integrative services.

7. Today, the repatriation and reintegration process has either been completed (as in Viet Nam) or is nearing completion (in Laos and the second Cambodian operation). A recent inspection report (INS/99/12) recommended that a lessons-learned exercise should be conducted to analyze and document UNHCR's repatriation and reintegration experience in each of three countries. The overall objective of the exercise is to enable UNHCR and its partners to design and implement future repatriation and reintegration operations that are more efficient, effective, and sustainable. The terms of reference for this project call for the identification and comparative analysis of (a) factors that promote sustainable reintegration and (b) cross-cutting themes emerging from the work in each country. The documents that report on these observations were designed to stimulate discussion at a workshop convened to identify lesson learned from the three countries.

8. To carry out this assignment, I visited each of the three countries for approximately one month. In Laos, I visited six of the 29 large group settlements. Even though somewhat less than half the repatriation cases involved large group settlement, such an approach seemed warranted as these areas received the bulk of attention in financial expenditures and staff time. In Viet Nam, I visited four areas of returnee concentration (Quang Ninh, Hai Phong, Hue, and Ho Chi Minh City). These cases involved either individuals or families that repatriated to both urban and rural areas. In Cambodia, I visited two former Khmer Rouge areas involved in the second repatriation operation (Samlot and Anlong Veng). In each country, I interviewed government officials at all administrative levels, various NGO partners, collaborating organizations (including sister UN agencies), and UNHCR international and local staff. I also reviewed UNHCR documents and reports from various collaborating agencies and governments as well as academic scholars. Most importantly, I interviewed as many returnees as time and circumstances permitted in each of three countries. Finally, in Bangkok, I met with two officials of the Royal Thai Government (RTG) involved with refugee affairs over the past two decades as well as one of the major Thai NGOs that provided extensive services in the Thailand refugee camps.

9. The first task in this undertaking was to formulate a conceptual framework and methodology to guide the field research and subsequent analysis. The question that I set out to answer was simply: What factors and circumstances promote positive and sustainable reintegration outcomes? In fact, the development of such a framework was an iterative process constantly modified over time by new insights and the sense understanding that unfolded with each country visited and, indeed, each interview held or document read. In this sense, I think it will be helpful to summarize, albeit at some length, the conceptual framework that has guided the field research and subsequent analysis. The reasons are twofold. First, I think it will help the reader better understand each of the three country sections and the comparative analysis that then follows. Second, it may serve as a model that can be usefully adapted to other lessons learned exercises in the future.

10. The following section, therefore, is devoted to a discussion of the conceptual and analytical framework. The three following sections examine in more detail the repatriation and reintegration operations in each of the countries. The primary emphasis in each of these sections is descriptive in nature, although I have interjected analytic comments and/or lesson learned observations wherever I thought useful. Each section is designed to stand alone, which may result in some overlap from one country to another. The final section represents the main document in which I identify some of the more salient cross-cutting themes and potential lessons learned that emerge from UNHCR's experiences in each of the three countries. The themes that I have identified are by no means exhaustive - indeed there are many more that may be of equal importance. However, I think it is more productive to focus on a few key themes in some detail, rather than to try any reader's patience with a more extensive yet less detailed list.

11. The final section includes a set of Annexes, which identify research sites, people and organizations visited, and some key documents reviewed in each country, including various UNHCR policy statements and evaluations. However, I have not identified the returnees who were interviewed for reasons of confidentiality. In each country, I was assisted by competent UNHCR international and local staff and received cordial cooperation from government officials at all levels in each of the three countries. I also received important support and guidance from UNHCR staff at the Bangkok regional office and at UNHCR headquarters in Geneva.

Conceptual framework

12. The term 'reintegration' is frequently used to refer to an individual's capacity for socio-economic self-sufficiency and ability to exercise citizenship rights consistent with neighbours and people in other communities. There are, however, no fixed indicators of what it might mean for an individual or community to be 'well-integrated' back into society. For example, there is no fixed number concerning the annual income an individual or household should earn or the assets they should possess. The indicators for 'successful' reintegration are, therefore, generally relative in nature measured by comparing an individual's circumstances with neighbours or members of a nearby community. By extension, this suggests that when individuals are repatriated in groups, the newly-created communities resemble nearby communities in access to services such as health and education. This approach recognises that some degree of disparity in wealth and the control over the distribution of resources within and across communities is inevitable, though not necessarily desirable.

13. To develop a research methodology and framework for analyzing the interplay of factors and circumstances that promote or inhibit sustainable reintegration in countries as different as Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, such relative assessments are necessary and useful, yet insufficient. I have, therefore, adopted a broader definition and methodology that considers how individuals and households are informally and formally linked with (a) one another within their community (internal linkages), and (b) other communities and markets, both domestic and foreign (external linkages). Over time, the strength and vitality of commercial, social, political, and administrative linkages are ultimately rooted in the context of family and clan relationships and the political economy of community organization and voluntary associations, as well as the macro-economic development policies and practices of the State in a particular historical context. The focus on integrative linkages in turn provides a useful way to identify and assess how UNHCR's policies and practices influence the way such factors affect reintegration.

14. Sustainable reintegration is a function of two broadly inter-related sets of factors. First and foremost are those factors that affect a household's capacity for achieving viable livelihoods through subsistence or commercial agricultural production, non-farming income generation, gainful employment, and/or small businesses. The capacity to produce and generate income in turn depends on (1) individual attributes; (2) household wealth and resources; (3) community circumstances; and (4) the socio-economic and political policies of the State. A second set of factors concerns the ability of the returnees to exercise their rights as citizens consistent with individuals in nearby communities, and indeed, in the national community at large. These factors include (a) accessibility of basic services; (b) protection of citizenship rights, and (c) political and administrative policies and procedures of the State.

Sustainable livelihoods

15. For individuals, the most significant factors contributing to sustainable socio-economic reintegration include: personal motivation and entrepreneurial talent; technical

knowledge and information about farming and small business management; and social status and position within the community. For households, the capital and labour resources available to or within the household are crucial. The most important factors associated with accumulation and investment of capital include: savings from employment while in the refugee camps; remittances from relatives living abroad; earnings from handicraft sales and employment; cash payments and in-kind assistance provided to families by UNHCR; access to credit; and control over productive inputs, especially land. In terms of labour resources, the most important factors are: the number, age, and gender of household and extended family members as well as the local price of wage labour. As for community circumstances, the most important factors are (a) ecological conditions, including land availability, soil quality, water resources; and (b) location relative to transportation and communication infrastructure and, in turn, local, regional, national, and international markets for labour, agricultural products, and handicrafts; and (c) availability of social services such as schools, health care, veterinary and crop extension, and potable water. The socio-economic development policies of the State include: macro-economic price policy (exchange rates, interest rates, tax requirements, and input subsidies); support for communication and transport infrastructure; local development objectives; and environmental policies proscribing certain practices, such as swidden farming in upland areas in Laos and logging in Cambodia.

Exercising equal rights as citizens

16. The most important factors governing access to scarce social and development services include: the availability, location, and quality of such services; the costs associated with obtaining such services; the capacity of returnees to participate in decision making about services, especially when they are locally provided (e.g. Water User Groups in Laos, Well Water Committees in Cambodia); and procedures (official and unofficial) employed by implementing agencies (e.g. credit for small-business, start-ups in Vietnam, vocational training in Laos). Factors influencing the ability to exercise the rights and prerogatives of citizenship include: obtaining identify cards, family books, and birth certificates; participating in local elections; membership in local associations; participating in social rites and ceremonies according to cultural heritage (e.g. holidays, marriages, and funerals); and the ability to travel freely subject to residency laws of the country. The most important factors influencing fair and equal treatment by government officials in a particular administrative jurisdiction (e.g. village, district) include: obtaining land titles and other relevant documents in a timely manner; the arbitration of civil conflicts (e.g. property rights); and procedural justice in legal matters, including arrests and prosecution for alleged crimes committed either prior to flight or after return. In all cases, the availability of information and the capacity to understand such information, which is often a function of education and experience, is a necessary prerequisite for effectively exercising one's citizenship rights.

Planning and implementation

17. The initial conditions establishing any specific path for socio-economic reintegration are subject, to varying degrees, to how UNHCR plans and implements reintegration assistance and protection monitoring in both the countries of first asylum and origin. The analytic focus on integrative linkages, therefore, examines the degree and manner in which these and other factors respond to policy and programming interventions by UNHCR, the State, and NGOs and other organizations. This approach

recognizes that many factors that promote sustainable reintegration are highly dependent on UNHCR and its partner organizations, while other factors lie outside their purview. This approach also recognizes that there is often a wide degree of discrepancy between policy intent and implementation outcomes. Such discrepancies are exacerbated by a number of factors, the most important of which are (a) discontinuities in coordinating information and activities between countries of first asylum and origin; (b) pressures associated with time, financial, and logistical constraints; (c) multiple partnerships with diverse organizations; and (d) fluctuating staffing patterns. The relative question is how can UNHCR policies and practices more effectively and efficiently rationalize intents with outcomes by (a) improving planning and management of its own resources, (b) complimenting factors that lie outside its influence, and/or (c) avoiding activities that may subvert people's initiative to undertake various activities on their own. For example, two of the most important factors governing peoples' capacity to establish self-sufficient and sustainable livelihoods concern (a) sources of capital accumulation, and (b) the nature and composition of the household, which conditions both the available labour and the type and amount of capital required for daily living expenditures and longer-term productive investments. In terms of policy and practice, these two factors are linked by the fact that food allotments and/or cash assistance are calculated on the basis of the number of individuals in a particular household. When food rations are inadequate to meet household needs, people must supplement their diets with income or savings that might otherwise be used for investment in food production and/or income generating activities such as handicraft production or small business start-ups. In this sense, policies and practices that require individuals and households to draw down on savings or current earnings may undermine the longer-term reintegration process that entails self-sufficiency in food production and/or income generating opportunities.

18. Such questions ultimately concern the degree to which UNHCR can plan in advance the scope, scale, duration, and nature of assistance activities that truly facilitates the reintegration of returning individuals and households back into society. The traditional approach to planning and, hence, analysis tends to divide refugee movements into distinctly separate phases that coincide with explicit events and periods of flight, asylum, and repatriation. Such approaches make sense given the fact that forced migrations across international borders are (a) usually well-defined in terms of time and location, and (b) require specific forms of assistance that must be planned and implemented in the context of donor support, budget cycles, and administrative procedures. However, such approaches may also fragment migration patterns into a series of discontinuous phases that either overlook or mask the structural evolution of social relationships and political organization within specific refugee communities. Such relationships and organizations are indeed affected by the circumstances of each phase, including outside interventions by UNHCR and other organizations, but nevertheless represent socio-political systems that evolve according to their own dialectical logic spanning all phases of migration. Two examples of this phenomenon concern (a) groups in Laos that were formed according to family, clan, and ethnic relationships and later repatriated as new communities; and (b) Khmer Rouge groups in Cambodia who have specialized in the controlled movement of their own cadre and the forced movement of large groups of other people. In this sense, then, the socio-economic and political factors that either inhibit or promote reintegration may be rooted in the circumstances prior to and during flight and asylum. For purposes of this analysis, therefore, all phases of refugee movement are considered to play important roles – albeit in different ways – in the eventual reintegration process.

19. A relevant set of questions concerns how and where UNHCR should locate itself on the continuum of emergency – development assistance. This continuum extends from well-defined point in terms of time (less well-defined in terms of location) of asylum and repatriation to increasingly ambiguous points in time concerning project implementation and UNHCR’s eventual phase out and exit. This is a vexing and difficult process for any organization; but in UNHCR’s case, it is especially complex given (a) the world-wide fluctuations and highly politicized nature of demand for its services in the face of increasingly scarce resources, and (b) the episodic movements of large groups of people that frequently take place in inaccessible and insecure locations. It is important to note that these factors make UNHCR a truly unique organization in which matters pertaining to information gathering and safety are central to the organization’s mission and culture. Another important aspect of such conundrums concerns UNHCR’s approach to programming that emphasizes the short-term emergency nature of assistance in the context of circumstances and conditions that often push and pull the organization in the direction of activities that over time increasingly resemble longer-term community development. This observation is, of course, not new or startling within UNHCR as it recalls the ongoing discussions concerning how the organization can most effectively and efficiently bridge the gap between emergency services and development assistance.

20. One important way that UNHCR tries to bridge such gaps has been to employ small-scale projects, including Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) and Micro-Projects (MPs). Such projects are important in terms of providing essential services to returnees and their communities, promoting goodwill among host communities and government officials, and maintaining access for protection monitoring. In general, projects are well defined in terms of discrete locations and time-bound activities, and, as such, appear at first glance to fit well into the traditional planning and implementation process, which – as noted above – divides interventions according to the flight, asylum, repatriation, and reintegration activities. However, because project planning and implementation tends to focus so intently on completing projects within a given time frame and budgeting cycles, planners may overlook or disregard the interplay between ecological conditions, social relationships, and organizational structures that inhibit and/or promote sustainable and equitable outcomes over the long term. Of equal importance is the possibility that planners may also overlook, or even avoid, certain projects that might otherwise be useful for promoting capacities for self-sufficiency. In this sense, then, the ability of QIPs and MPs to actually bridge the gap between emergency and development needs in ways that are truly sustainable and equitable depends on the degree and manner to which they strengthen social, economic, and administrative linkages between returnees and their respective communities.

21. It may be helpful at this point to say a few words about the so-called emergency – development continuum and the concepts of sustainability and equability. First of all, it is important to bear in mind that such a continuum is largely contextual and will differ in terms of activities according to local ecologies, socio-economic structures, and political organization. In terms of repatriation, the primary focus must be on food security and safety, which requires an initial emphasis on food rations and cash assistance, shelter, access to clean water, health care, and public security. On the other end of the spectrum are development activities designed to institutionalize ongoing socio-economic and political relationships between individuals and households on the one hand, and civil society (e.g. markets, NGOs) and the State on the other hand. Such activities include more complex – and thus costly and time-consuming – inputs that are, for all intents and purposes, concerned primarily with matters of sustainable governance and finance. Somewhere at various points along the along the continuum between emergency

assistance and self-governance are a wide range of possible activities that may be required to ensure protection and accelerate reintegration. Such activities include, inter-alia, the provision of land and livestock, credit, income generating activities, education and vocational training, and specialized services for EVIs.

22. The point at which certain types of projects on the continuum are implemented relative to social and economic context has an important bearing on the sustainability and equitability of project outcomes. For example, the evolution of farming systems is characterized by the way people mix household labour with available capital in the context of local ecological and market conditions. The inputs required for subsistence agricultural production in swidden conditions differ from those required for commercialized cash crop production. In the absence of cohesive social structures and effective governance mechanisms, inputs that are mismatched with a particular farming system may benefit one group more than another. Another example concerns the degree to which vocational training programmes match skill development with local markets for labour and capital resources. In this sense, vocational training programmes that combine job counselling and access to credit are better positioned to help people find gainful employment. In all cases, special attention must be devoted to ensuring that women and disadvantaged individuals enjoy equal access to and control over decisions concerning project inputs and the distribution of their outcomes.

Governance

23. In order to promote sustainable and equitable reintegration outcomes, therefore, decision rules (i.e. criteria) about the distribution and management of scarce public and private resources must be negotiated and enforced, which is of course a matter of governance and public finance. By committing itself to sustainable inputs that bridge the gap between emergency and development through QIPs, UNHCR may be – perhaps unwittingly – committing itself to a more complex involvement in socio-economic and political engineering. The rationale for such involvement stems from UNHCR's general mandate for protection and monitoring, which has over time expanded to cover a wide range of activities to ensure that all returnees enjoy equal access to basic services and are not discriminated against on the basis of their returnee status. Such matters are more manageable when services are already available, or when institutions providing such services are already well established, as in the case in Viet Nam (e.g. credit and vocational training). In Cambodia and Laos, the matter is more difficult as the institutions governing such services are either weak or non-existent. In the case of Cambodia, however, such gaps in institutional framework are partially mitigated by an emerging and relatively vibrant civil society. In all cases, the degree to which such projects are sustainable depends on how project activities connect people to each other, service providers, and local, regional, or national governance structures. This in turn underscores the fact that the operational relationship between UNHCR, the State, and partner organizations plays a crucial role in determining the extent to which integrative linkages are sustainable and equitable at the individual, household, and community level.

24. In this sense, then, the analysis of reintegration practices must consider the nature of the dynamic relationships between State/Government – Civil Society – and UNHCR/UN. The relationships between UNHCR and the respective governments of Cambodia, Laos, and Viet Nam have been governed by formal MOUs and sub-agreements that establish policy framework and implementation guidelines for the repatriation and reintegration procedures. Such relationships affect the nature and extent of relationships between UNHCR and civil society on the one hand, and the State and

civil society on the other hand. It should be noted that the term “civil society” is currently much used, though ambiguously understood. I refer to civil society as the socio-economic and political space between the family and the State that is reserved for private voluntary associations and their activities. Many NGOs have adopted a definition which focuses on the degree of independence accorded by the government to the formation and action of organizations outside (and even, in opposition to) the government. Other institutions focus more on free markets and the presence of private firms as an indicator of civil society development. The definition I employ considers both NGOs and private firms as important components of civil society which fundamentally affect how UNHCR goes about the business of repatriation and reintegration.

25. UNHCR’s approach to sustainability in this regard relies on a strategy that encourages NGOs and other organizations, including UN and government agencies, to continue working in reintegration areas with their own funds after UNHCR withdraws. This strategy makes good sense when understood within the context of UNHCR’s protection mandate and competition over scarce resources from other areas in the world. However, it represents a bit of a gamble in several ways. First, each country entails a different mix of institutional strengths and weaknesses. For example, in Vietnam the State is much stronger relative to civil society when it comes to providing development assistance and social services, while in Cambodia the opposite is true. Meanwhile, in Laos neither the State nor civil society is strong in terms of providing such services. Second, both NGOs and the State operate according to interest and mandates that often differ substantively with UNHCR’s primary concern for monitoring and protection of returnee rights. While there is often a sufficient degree of overlap to allow for fruitful working relationships, there is also considerable scope for misunderstanding, confusion, and conflict. Third, all projects inevitably progress at uneven rates and eventually generate uneven benefits despite organizations’ best intentions to promote participatory, sustainable, and equitable outcomes. This suggests, then, that UNHCR will often phase out its operations even when some projects are either incomplete or inadequately covered by other organizations. It also suggests that UNHCR may leave behind a legacy of social and economic disparity within and across returnee communities.

Conclusion

26. The important question in this regard, then, is how can UNHCR plan and implement projects from the very outset of repatriation to promote sustainable and equitable reintegration outcomes. The efficiency and effectiveness of such approaches depends ultimately on the degree to which (a) institutional assessments and strategic planning link activities in the countries of asylum and repatriation procedures with UNHCR’s reintegration objectives, and (b) continual monitoring, evaluation, and adjustments in project planning at the level of implementation are coordinated with partner organizations and the returnees themselves. The degree to which UNHCR commits its scarce resources to such processes depends largely on how the organization assesses and evaluates its mission according to available time, financing, staffing, and strategies relative to contextual opportunities and constraints. This then suggests that exercises such as this in which lessons learned are identified, articulated, and discussed can indeed play a useful role in strengthening planning and implementation processes. The idea is not so much to evaluate what should have been done, but rather to look at each case in these terms: if staff knew then what they know now, what could they have done differently or similarly. Ultimately, no two refugee situations are alike, though some may resemble others more closely. The degree to which lessons learned from one

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situation can be applied to other contexts depends on the expertise, experience, judgement, and collective wisdom of staff. In this sense, the application of lessons learned to other contexts is both art and science.

Laos

Introduction

27. During 1980-2000, UNHCR, in collaboration with the government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic and several international and non-governmental organizations, successfully repatriated 29,068 Laotian refugees from camps in neighbouring Thailand and, to a much lesser extent, settlement sites in China and other third countries. Three settlement patterns were employed to repatriate individuals and households back to Laos. First, 10,717 people were repatriated to 29 large rural settlement sites, generally of 30 or more households. Second, 1,243 people were repatriated to 10 small group settlement sites involving approximately 30 households attached to pre-existing communities. Third, 17,108 individuals – either singles or in families – returned to their home communities. All returnees received a one-time cash grant and a basic package of repatriation assistance (cash or in kind), which included rice for 18-24 months, materials for home construction, small animals, mosquito nets, tools, and rice and vegetables seeds. Returnees in small or large group settlements also received land for home plots and cultivation.

28. UNHCR's work was governed by a Memorandum of Understanding with the government of Laos (GOL) that outlined the modalities of the repatriation and reintegration operations. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' (MFA) Department of International Organizations co-ordinated with the Ministries of Interior and Defence on matters pertaining to security clearances and entry documents for each returnee. The MFA/IO also co-ordinated with the MOI in matters pertaining to protection cases initiated by UNHCR. UNHCR's primary implementing partner in the GOL was the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MLSW), responsible for co-ordinating all repatriation and reintegration activities within the government administration at the provincial and district levels. The initial repatriation activities included site selection, transportation to resettlement sites, reception site activities, temporary shelter at each resettlement site, and documentation.

29. UNHCR has maintained an office in Vientiane from where country-wide operations were coordinated. Throughout its twenty-year tenure in Laos, UNHCR has employed both local and international staff to conduct protection monitoring, oversee the implementation of small-scale reintegration projects, coordinate work with the GOL, and collaborate with other international organizations that have provided reintegration assistance.

30. In the following pages, I will focus on the repatriation and reintegration process as it pertains to the large group settlement process, particularly in the six communities I visited during the field research. These sites are characterized by a wide diversity in ethnicity, time of return, land availability and quality, and location (e.g. logistical access, proximity to markets). In Section 2, I review some of the strategic factors affecting UNHCR's work with large group settlements in Laos. In Section 3, I discuss ways that group reintegration was affected by camp residency and the repatriation process. In

Section 4, I discuss in some detail large group settlements in terms of protection and monitoring, various forms of assistance, and the more salient factors concerning agricultural production in Laos. In Section 5, I then look at how these factors have affected the integrative linkages that connect returnees with Lao society and comment on the sustainability of inputs and the equitability of reintegration outcomes. In Section 6, I conclude by summarizing some of the more important features of the Laos case.

Strategic factors

31. Several outstanding social, economic, and political factors have affected the scope, scale, and pace of UNHCR's repatriation and reintegration efforts. First, Laos is a predominantly rural society in which 85% of the population of 5.2 million is engaged in subsistence agricultural in remote areas that are often difficult to reach because of mountainous geography and poor communication infrastructure. In order to promote self-sufficient and sustainable livelihoods, UNHCR and its partners provided returnees with the basic means of agricultural production, including land, tools, livestock, extension services and in some cases, roads and irrigation.

32. Second, Lao society is comprised of different ethnic groups that have traditionally inhabited various ecological niches throughout the country, and as a result, practice different systems of farming. The Lao Theung and Lao Suong groups, who comprise approximately 35% of the population, tend to reside in more remote, upland areas and practice subsistence forms of shifting cultivation. The majority Lao Loum groups tend to reside in lowland areas and practice more productive forms of wet-rice cultivation. The divisions between these two agro-ecological and socio-cultural ways of life constitute the fundamental fault lines along which Lao society tends to divide and compete over scarce development resources, access to natural resource assets, and political power.

33. Third, since coming to power in 1975, the Pathet Lao government has been extremely insecure about its relationships with (a) various ethnic groups within the country, and (b) larger, more economically vibrant and politically assertive countries in the region, especially Thailand. The large presence of refugee groups in Thailand, many of whom were upland groups such as the Hmong that sided with US-backed forces in the civil war, represented a long-standing security threat in the eyes of the GOL. In the wake of Vietnamese military withdrawal in the late 1980s and the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, the GOL has cautiously moved to resolve a number of political problems within the region, including the issue of refugees in Thailand. However, as the refugee repatriation efforts are currently winding down, the Lao government remains vigilant about the perceived threat such groups pose to domestic security. The intensification of fighting between Hmong groups and the Lao Army in the central highlands north of Vientiane suggests that political stability in Laos is increasingly fragile.

34. Fourth, the socio-political space most commonly referred to as "civil society" in which organizations can operate independently of the government is quite narrow. There are no local development NGOs, the activities of international organizations and NGOs are carefully regulated, foreign-based religious activity is discouraged, and discussions about matters pertaining to human rights and other political matters are extremely sensitive. These circumstances have posed significant constraints on (a) UNHCR's strategic options for forming partnership alliances to implement reintegration projects, and (b) how UNHCR has provided protection and monitoring services for

returnees. For example, MLSW officials have accompanied UNHCR staff on all field missions. While this could be helpful for solving certain problems on the spot and keeping government officials informed about the work, it also inhibited open and frank discussions between UNHCR staff and returnees about protection issues.

35. Fifth, the institutional and financial capacity of the government to provide basic services at the local level is generally weak, and in some cases practically non-existent. The Lao government is highly dependent on foreign assistance to supplement low staff salaries and provide training and capital inputs for strengthening human resource capacity and rural infrastructure. As a result, UNHCR has had to provide extensive inputs to MLSW in terms of office equipment, transportation, and daily allowances for staff while on missions to support their role in the repatriation and reintegration work.

36. Sixth, in 1986 the Lao government initiated a series of reforms known as the New Economic Mechanism (NEM). The NEM was designed to reverse the stagnating affects of collectivized agricultural production by promoting rapid economic growth through a market-oriented development strategy. In this sense, the GOL's macro-economic policies have played an important role in terms of promoting sustainable reintegration outcomes by creating a more favourable economic climate than existed before the majority of returnees repatriated to Laos. These reforms have enabled rural households, including returnees, to invest in agricultural production and small business start-ups and market farm produce and handicrafts independently of the government.

Camp residency and repatriation

37. The degree to which the above factors have affected the group reintegration process were in turn influenced to varying degrees by two additional sets of factors that relate more specifically to camp residency and repatriation planning. First, certain socio-economic and political pre-conditions for group settlement were established in the Thai refugee camps. For example, some returnees were able to generate savings and learn new vocational skills through overseas remittances, employment (e.g. carpentry, smithing), and trade (e.g. handicrafts such as embroidery and jewellery). Some people, including women and children, also attended Thai or Lao language schools in the camps. This helped promote a practical literacy in Lao language upon return. Other individuals learned new ideas about farming from their observations of agricultural activities in Thailand, such as hand-tiller operation and aquaculture.

38. At the same time, many resettlement groups were formed in the Thai camps on the basis of marriage and kinship connections, geographic origins, and/or political affiliation. Group leaders (a) acted as the primary mediators between their respective groups and outside organizations, including UNHCR, the Thai government, foreign governments, and advocacy groups and (b) played important roles in influencing people's perceptions of group settlement as a viable and secure option for voluntary repatriation. Such roles provided leaders with considerable prestige and power in terms of access to and control over resources and information both in the camps and once in Laos. As a result of such circumstances and activities in the camps, repatriated groups were already somewhat socially cohesive and politically organized and, to some degree, differentiated according to social position, access to political power, and control over capital assets.

39. Second, the group settlement process required considerable time and information for planning and project implementation. For example, to make informed

decisions about repatriation, returnees required information concerning the general situation in Laos as well as specific conditions of a given locale to which they would likely be resettled. The GOL needed information about the number of people for requested location in order to identify potential sites, a process that required coordination across and within various ministries at different administrative levels. UNHCR also needed information concerning the demographic characteristics of specific groups and individuals in order to plan and coordinate reintegration services with partner organizations. Meanwhile, Thai authorities and UNHCR staff in the camps required advanced information about probable departure dates in order to initiate documentation, health screening, and transport procedures. UNHCR helped fill such information gaps by facilitating visits to Laos by group leaders to learn first-hand about general situation in the country as well as conditions at specific resettlement sites. UNHCR also facilitated visits by GOL officials and its own staff to the camps in order to share information about the voluntary repatriation programme with prospective returnees.

40. The entire planning process associated with repatriation was conducted within the context of time constraints with (1) the Thai government's policy to relocate camp residents back to Laos as quickly as possible and (2) specific deadlines associated with getting returnees resettled according to local agricultural cycles (e.g. well before the annual monsoon rains). The most time consuming activities in terms of repatriation planning and site preparation included: site selection (e.g. identifying land, obtaining security approvals); transportation and reception; temporary shelter at resettlement sites; documentation; transportation; and land allocation. The factors with the most significant long-term reintegration consequences at each site concerned the potential for sustainable agricultural production and marketing. I will therefore consider some of the more salient features of agricultural production and land usage in more detail below.

41. For large and small group repatriation, primary consideration was given to locating areas where there appeared to be sufficient land available for a group of a certain size. However, site selection was constrained by several factors. First, the GOL's environmental policies concerning the reduction of slash-and-burn agricultural production ostensibly precluded repatriation in upland areas. Second, the availability of arable land in lowland areas suitable for wet-rice cultivation was limited in many parts of the country. Third, the size of some of the groups required fairly extensive parcels of land if the general rule of thumb concerning 1 ha per household was to be scrupulously followed.

42. District and provincial officials proposed various sites based on lists of potential returnee groups provided by UNHCR and estimates of available land. Whenever possible, UNHCR staff visited proposed sites to ascertain their feasibility in terms of quantity, quality, and location relative to potential markets, services, and infrastructure. In some cases, proposed sites were rejected according to these criteria. Nevertheless, the initial estimates of productive land often proved to be too high. Moreover, pre-existing land disputes were rarely, if ever, adequately resolved, despite the government's assertion that they took care of such matters by informing local communities that a certain area of land was reserved for returnees. Such approaches obscured local use claims in the sense that potential conflicts lay dormant until returnees actually arrived. Given the central role that land plays in rural modes of production, such circumstances greatly affected the ability of some returnees to quickly establish sustainable livelihoods.

Reintegration: large group settlements in rural areas

43. The group settlement approach meant that not only was UNHCR trying to facilitate the reintegration of individuals and households back into Lao society, it was also trying to establish and integrate entirely new communities into Lao society. In the case of small group settlements that were incorporated into pre-existing villages, it meant that UNHCR was involved with restructuring rural communities. The fact that these new communities were established in rural areas also meant that individuals and households had to establish viable means of agricultural production in order to develop sustainable livelihoods. This kind of social engineering required the creation of an entire community-wide infrastructure of basic services, including potable water, education, health care, local transport, as well as the provision of various inputs to enable families to engage in agricultural production.

44. The business of creating new communities in rural areas had several important affects on UNHCR's work in Laos. First, the group settlement approach pushed UNHCR beyond its mandate to focus on protection and short term inputs into playing a larger role in terms of promoting community development and institutional capacity building. Second, it therefore confronted UNHCR with all the problems and constraints associated with the efficacy, equitability, and sustainability of inputs and services routinely experienced by other community development organizations working in Laos. Third, in the context of wider institutional constraints on civil society and the administrative weakness of the GOL, it meant that UNHCR had to rely on a relatively small number of international organizations and NGOs as well as government agencies as their implementing partners. These factors all combined to affect (1) how UNHCR carried out its protection activities, (2) the scope and scale of the services and inputs available to returnees and their communities, and (3) the short-term impact and long-term sustainability of agricultural inputs.

Protection and case monitoring

45. The most salient protection issues involved efforts to ensure that returnees were not discriminated against on the basis of their returnee status in accessing basic services and enjoyment of citizenship rights. Second, UNHCR staff devoted considerable time and effort to ensuring that returnees in group settlements received adequate land free of unexploded ordnance and that land disputes were settled in ways that did not discriminate against returnees. Third, UNHCR staff routinely followed up to verify that all returnees receive proper documentation (e.g. ID cards, land titles). This matter was complicated when field officers discovered that some returnees had received specially marked ID cards. Fourth, UNHCR tried to ensure that extremely vulnerable individuals (EVI) received appropriate services whenever available. The EVI cases included single-women heads of households and people with special health problems and needs. UNHCR's efforts to ensure people were not discriminated against on the basis of their returnee status were sometimes complicated when specific cases involved returnees from minority ethnic groups.

46. The international and national staff faced several external constraints in their efforts to monitor protection cases in Laos. First, many returnee communities were located in remote areas which precluded easy access. Second, the ubiquitous presence of GOL officials accompanying all UNHCR field missions impeded direct access to returnees and hindered open and frank discussions of protection related matters. Third, the lack of codified legal procedures meant there were few objective criteria for follow up

and, when appropriate, make formal appeals. Fourth, follow-up on cases referred to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was inconsistent, in part due to the cumbersome nature of inter-ministerial relationships and communication between various levels of the GOL administration. For example, in cases involving land disputes, it was not always clear which level of the administration had the right and/or responsibility to intervene. Moreover, UNHCR has not been able to gain access to returnees in matters such as arrest cases. Fifth, the intense scrutiny by various advocacy organizations and governments put significant pressure on UNHCR to focus attention on certain groups (e.g. the Hmong).

47. Staff also faced several internal constraints that hindered UNHCR's ability to monitor protection on a consistent basis. First, a workable database was not established in the beginning of the operation, which would have necessarily included consistent spelling of locations and names to facilitate tracking specific returnees. Also, computer technology used in the office, including database software, was not routinely upgraded nor did staff receive adequate training in such matters. As a result, it became increasingly difficult over time to keep track of case profiles and ongoing monitoring assessments. Second, prior to 1995, there were few international staff who spoke either Lao or Hmong, and most protection work had to be carried out using local staff as interpreters.

48. It should be noted, however, that UNHCR's monitoring access to returnees has greatly improved since 1995 when two international staff fluent in Lao and Hmong were employed. Moreover, returnees routinely contact staff at UNHCR's Vientiane office concerning a variety of matters, including protection-related matters. Such contacts, coupled with the relatively long tenure of the current international field staff, have enabled UNHCR staff to establish a wide-ranging network of information concerning the overall situation pertaining to returnees.

49. Of particular interest is how the group settlement approach has affected UNHCR's ability to carry out its mandate concerning protection monitoring. Even though the longer-term process associated with community building has required additional time and resources, it also provided a rationale, and therefore opportunities, for frequent monitoring visits to communities during which protection issues could be addressed. However, the need for continuing monitoring access has made it increasingly difficult for UNHCR to affect clear exit strategies from its ongoing commitments to provide services and infrastructure the fledgling rural resettlement sites. Over time, a backlog of accumulated expectations (e.g. repair work for drinking water and irrigation systems) created a constant demand on scarce financial and human resources for continued assistance. A good example of the dilemma concerning the relationship between protection monitoring and continued assistance occurred at the Hmong resettlement site at Ban Pha Thao where ongoing land rights disputes involving residents of nearby communities were resolved only when additional land was cleared with UNHCR assistance. Such ambiguous and unpredictable commitments, when merged with the concomitant opportunities for monitoring access, meant that UNHCR was not able to pinpoint with any degree of clarity when its work with a particular community would actually be completed.

50. Such dilemmas were further exacerbated by the fact that many returnees were initially reluctant to return because they wanted to resettle in a third country and/or they feared the consequences of repatriation. In addition, the external procedures (e.g. screening and processing people out of the camps) and internal procedures (e.g. site selection and preparation, security clearances) associated with group settlement required

considerable time. As a result, the overall repatriation stretched out over a period of several years despite the relatively small number of total returnees (when compared to Vietnam or Cambodia Repat 1). In short, as long as there were people in the camps waiting to repatriate, UNHCR was obligated to continue providing on-going assistance and protection monitoring for the ever-growing number of returnee communities, and individuals, in Laos. Under such circumstances, it was not surprising to find a significant degree of variability in the nature and rate of individual, household, and community integration.

Reintegration assistance

51. To provide basic social services for returnees and nearby communities, UNHCR contracted with three international NGOs (Concern, Consortium, and ZOA) to implement small-scale reintegration projects in many of the large group settlement sites. Other international organizations and donors (e.g. the European Union through the EURP and EUFAR programmes as well as the US government through IOM) also made substantial contributions for infrastructure development in various reintegration sites throughout the country.

EC's Fonds d'Assistance aux Rapatriés Lao (FAR)

52. The EC's FAR programme was implemented from mid-1995 through mid-1999. FAR provided assistance for returnee families in small and large repatriation sites as well as neighbouring communities in 12 provinces for rural infrastructure (roads, bridges, markets) and "complementary socio-economic development." The FAR support for agricultural production included two small-scale irrigation systems (Ban Nam Phakhan, Khammoune and Ban Muang Soum, Xaysomboun Special Zone) as well as crop and livestock extension services in various locations. FAR also financed the construction and refurbishing of twenty-four primary and secondary schools buildings in key returnee settlement areas in nine provinces as well as teacher training and adult literacy programmes in other sites. In addition, FAR financed two primary health care centres and two district hospitals and various drinking water systems.

European Union Resettlement and Reintegration Project (EURP)

53. The EURP programme provided reintegration assistance in Bokeo Province from March 1994 - December 1997. The projects served 229 repatriating families (Hmong) and surrounding communities in Pha Oudom and Nam Puk (Saysomboun, Xaichaleurn). The EURP programme provided some assistance for rural roads and public markets. In education, EURP financed the construction of two primary schools and the renovation of seven existing schools as well as adult literacy classes in both areas. In public health, EURP financed the construction of 69 wells and one-gravity fed water supply system, and subsidized the construction of over 500 latrines. They also provided mosquito nets to returnee and local families, health training for Village Health Volunteers, immunization campaigns, and a dispensary. The EURP programme's support for agricultural production included irrigation for 609 hectares and helped establish Water User Groups in the Nam Puk area as well as extension services for crops, livestock and aquaculture. Of special interest is the EURP programme's introduction of eight handtillers (four in each resettlement area) to help returnees with land preparation.

Concern

54. Concern started working in Laos in May 1992 as an implementing partner for UNHCR. Concern initially worked in four settlement sites in the southern provinces of Champassak (Ban Nongbouathong), Savanakhet (Ban Xaibouathong), and Khammoune (Ban Nam Pakanh Mai and, later, Ban Na Saat). The work in these varied from 2-3 years and included support for education (e.g. school construction, teacher training), public health (e.g. potable water, malaria prevention, sanitation, revolving drug funds), and agriculture (e.g. crop extension, animal health, animal banks). In 1995, Concern initiated work in two additional sites in Bokeo province (Ban Saysomboun, Ban Houisay Noi). This work included agricultural development (e.g. crop extension, animal health, animal banks) and sanitation. In 1996, Concern expanded its reintegration programming in Thakhek district, Khammoune to include community development activities in five villages surrounding Ban Na Saat. This assistance included water supply, health education and revolving drug funds, the construction of health clinics and latrines, and agricultural inputs and training.

Consortium

55. Consortium has provided reintegration assistance with UNHCR funding since the early 1990s. Consortium has worked in Luang Prabang (Ban Phonmani, Ban Thong Phiang Vilay, Ban Sivilay), Sayaboury (Dong Luang A, all sites), and Vientiane (Ban Pha Thao). Consortium has focused on agricultural development (e.g. animal health and production, extension services for rice, fruit, and commercial crop production), public health (e.g. malaria prevention, sanitation, potable water, birth spacing, revolving drug funds), income generation (e.g. micro-credit loan schemes for handicraft and animal production), and education (e.g. adult literacy, parent teacher associations, pre-school learning tools, teacher training). In 1997, Consortium initiated an opium detoxification programme in Phonmani. The US government provided initial funding for this effort and the UN Drug Control Program (UNDCP) will support this project in the future.

ZOA

56. Since 1994, ZOA has provided a variety of assistance with UNHCR funding for returnees and people in communities in three areas. In Ban Na Sou (Xiang Khouang), ZOA has provided assistance, with varying degrees of success, for income generation (embroidery), adult literacy, health (traditional birth attendants, sanitation), small livestock production. ZOA has had modest success with loan projects supporting small animal production and weaving. In Viengkham (Xiang Khouang), ZOA has worked with about a quarter of the families, providing support for agricultural production (livestock production, irrigation for 30 ha., rice and fruit tree cultivation); education (teacher training and adult literacy); health (birth attendants and sanitation); and income generation (handicraft revolving funds). In Oudomsin (Luang Namtha), ZOA has provided assistance for 52 repatriated families and six other neighbouring villages, including support for rice banks, animal health and production, aquaculture, income generating activities (weaving).

Agricultural production

57. The farming systems employed by different groups in Laos vary according to local ecologies and the amount of household labour available relative to the quantity and

quality of land and capital assets. At one end of the spectrum are subsistence swidden systems in which household members provide the sole source of power. At the other end of the spectrum are commercialized production systems that rely more on mechanical power for land preparation, use irrigation to manage water resources, sometimes engage wage labour, and frequently cultivate two rice crops annually. Upland farmers, including those in the large and small group settlement sites, who make the transition from swidden to paddy production, must learn new farming technologies involving land preparation, water management, animal husbandry, and mechanization. In this section, I will briefly review these four factors of production in terms of the reintegration assistance provided by UNHCR and its collaborating organizations.

Land

58. The main priority for UNHCR and its partners in terms of group repatriation and eventual reintegration has been locating resettlement sites in areas with sufficient land (i.e. 1 ha/household) to enable returnees to develop paddy fields for rice cultivation. Despite UNHCR's efforts to ascertain their feasibility in terms of quantity, quality, and location relative to potential markets and social services, the government's initial estimates of available arable land was, as noted above, often too optimistic. As a result, some returnees in various villages received only upland fields where the productivity of land and labour tends to be lower. The quality of the land also varied in terms of soil conditions, slope, and elevation as well as location relative to water sources and one's home. In this sense, returnees routinely discovered there was not enough productive land to meet everyone's subsistence requirements. Moreover, pre-existing land disputes were, as noted above, rarely, resolved ahead of time. In fact, many disputes over land emerged only when irrigation systems were implemented.

59. The actual methods used to distribute land varied from site to site. Generally, land was allocated by lottery at the village level in which households drew numbers that corresponded to both designated home and cultivation plots (e.g. Ban Thong Phiang Vilay, Ban Pha Thao). In Ban Xaichaleurn, however, EURP officials reported using their own lottery system to distribute land in the irrigation command area they constructed – a kind of administrative lottery, as it were. In all the lotteries, some differences in the size of cultivation plots were allowed to take into account variations in household size. Most people initially perceived the lotteries to be fair as it appeared that everyone had an equal chance to receive better quality land. In one sense, then, the lottery system highlights the role that luck can play in influencing reintegration outcomes; but in reality, it underscores the role that social and economic power can play in minimizing the effects of chance. For example, in Ban Pha Thao, village leaders claimed better quality plots ahead of the lottery as compensation for their work on projects such as the irrigation system. Some local officials and families also received land in the area set aside for returnees. In other cases, it appears that people close to the village leaders, including the relatives of community leaders from elsewhere in Laos, frequently received the best land. Such actions, when coupled with the low estimates of good quality land, increased the number of people who received either poor land relative to location within an irrigation system, or land where they had to practice swidden cultivation.

60. In Ban Thong Phiang Vilay, returnees also reported that some people bought and traded land among themselves following the lottery in order to improve their own positions and/or consolidate adjacent holdings within an extended family or clan. In other cases, such as in Ban Pha Thao, some returnees were also able to buy paddy land from other nearby villagers soon after arrival. In this sense, then, people were able to

improve their land holdings using available capital resources they had from handicraft trade, overseas remittances, and/or repatriation cash grants. The result of the lottery system and the post-distribution jockeying resulted in pattern of land ownership and control that somewhat mirrored the socio-political hierarchy of power and wealth in the refugee communities. In other words, those with more capital resources and/or positions of power tended to receive better land while those with fewer capital resources and social connections received poorer quality land. In this sense, the land distribution process accelerated the rate of socio-economic stratification among households within returnee communities. Relative to other nearby communities, the rate of social stratification appears to have been compressed into a remarkably brief period of time.

Irrigation

61. After land and labour, water is the most important component of wet-rice production. Community irrigation systems enhance people's ability to control available water resources during the rainy season, and replenish the soil with important nutrients. In areas where water is sufficient year round, irrigation makes double cropping possible and community members with good land can then begin to move into commercial production if they possess sufficient capital assets with which to mechanize. The amount of water each household receives depends on (a) the total volume of available water; (b) the quality of canal construction and maintenance; and (c) the method used for distributing water. Generally speaking, the productivity of land near the head of the system and/or the main canals is greater than land at the tail end of the system and/or the outer reaches served by secondary and tertiary canals. The management of irrigation systems in terms of water distribution and maintenance is primarily a matter of socio-political organization involving Water User Groups (WUGs). In many resettlement communities, such institutions required new patterns of cooperation for upland groups (e.g. the Hmong), who have had little prior experience with wet rice cultivation.

62. Generally speaking, irrigation systems increase the total amount of rice produced in a village. However, many of the large group sites with potentially irrigable land did not receive irrigation assistance. The uneven distribution of irrigation resources, then, would account in large part for uneven reintegration outcomes across communities. Even though irrigation systems increase community production, the distribution of benefits is often unevenly distributed among households within the community for many of the reasons cited above. The variable quality of land and the location of land relative to the irrigation canals means that some returnees in the irrigated villages have benefited more than others do from such inputs. In the long run, the sustainability of the system depends, in part, on the distribution of benefits. For example, people who do not receive enough water may resist paying fees to the WUGs and/or contributing labour for canal repair.

63. In several repatriation areas, the irrigation system served both the returnee community as well as nearby communities (e.g. Ban Pha Thao and Ban Xaichaleurn). The successful management of the irrigation systems, therefore, required some degree of cooperation among all the villages served. In this sense, the Water User Groups (WUGs) also served to promote cooperation among returnees and their neighbours. This was especially important in cases where the land ownership patterns resulted in a mixed social composition of the water distribution sub-units within the system. For example, in the Nam Puk system (Ban Xaichaleurn), some of the small units included households from both the returnee village and other nearby villages. Disputes that could not be resolved within the smaller unit were forwarded to the WUG governing committee,

where the responsibility for arbitrating disputes was held by a returnee from Xaichaleurn. The post of Vice President was also held by a returnee from Xaichaleurn. In this sense, the WUG management structure was designed to reflect the composition of mixed land-use and gave an important degree of authority to the returnee groups. However, such mechanisms have not always been successful. For example, in Ban Pha Thao, serious conflicts over water distribution remain unresolved. Moreover, many returnees indicated they feel hampered in asserting their rights in such conflicts because they - as returnees - are expected not to complain

Livestock

64. Livestock represents another critical component of farm investment. Generally speaking, animal husbandry is divided into (a) small animal (pigs and chickens) production, which is traditionally managed by women for home consumption and sale; and (b) large animal (cattle and buffalo) production, which is usually managed by men. Large animals are used for a variety of purposes, including land preparation in paddy cultivation and a form of savings for emergencies, such as illnesses and food shortages. Cattle and buffalo often play a key role in the transition from swidden to wet-rice production as they provide traction power, transport, and green fertilizer. Large and small animals are subject to variety of diseases, which when fatal can erode a family's savings and reduce their income earning capacity. UNHCR and its partners supported livestock production by (a) providing cash assistance for livestock purchases; (b) providing large animals through revolving loan programmes; and (c) training community-based Village Livestock Agents (VLAs).

65. Several comments regarding these forms of assistance are worth noting. First, in communities such as Ban Pha Thao and Xaichaleurn, many farmers skipped the large animal phase of production by using hand tillers for land preparation (see mechanized power below). In such cases, large-scale expenditures for cattle and buffalo may have been somewhat misguided unless there were other compelling reasons for doing so.

66. Second, the methods used to provide large and small animals to returnees through various revolving loan schemes, such as cattle banks, was inequitable in the short term because those families who received an animal early in the process benefited more than those who either received one later, or not at all. One reason is that such schemes were often organizationally unsustainable, especially when outside sponsors were no longer present to oversee the process, and may collapse before each targeted household receives an animal. Another reason is that some households were selected on the basis of nepotism and/or patronage by local implementing partners. People's dissatisfaction with these projects was exacerbated by the fact such schemes were funded with money that was initially allocated as part of the standard assistance package (e.g. USD60/household).

67. Third, the training that various VLAs received in veterinary health care was often rudimentary and left VLAs ill-prepared to deal with both routine and serious problems affecting village livestock. The VLA's ability to provide basic inputs such as vaccines was also constrained by a lack of resources at the district centre as well as people's inability or unwillingness to pay for such services. Though VLAs potentially represent an important linkage between their community and the district administration, such connections were, in reality, often quite tenuous in the returnee communities.

Mechanized power

68. UNHCR provided considerable inputs for many, though not all, of the villages in terms of clearing land with large machinery. Such inputs enabled households to save on labour inputs, but may have damaged soil that reduced productivity until nutrients could be replenished by irrigation. In Ban Pha Thao and Ban Xaichaleurn, both Hmong communities that eventually received irrigation systems after their arrival, farmers more or less skipped the large animal phase of production and went directly to mechanized farming by using hand-tillers (iron buffaloes) for land preparation. Rice mills also represent another important labour-saving input in the evolution toward mechanized agriculture in returnee communities. Often a household that owns and operates a rice mill will also own and operate a hand-tiller. Hand-tiller and rice mill purchases have been financed through a variety of means, including initial cash grants from UNHCR, savings from employment in the refugee camps, overseas remittances, handicraft sales, livestock sales, and non-farm employment. In some cases, clan members have pooled resources in order to purchase a hand-tiller and/or rice mill. The EURP project also provided four hand-tillers in both Ban Xaichaleurn and Pha Oudom in Bokeo for community use. In both cases, the EURP also provided training and facilities so that the machinery could be maintained and repaired.

Resource allocation

69. The time between a group's arrival, land distribution and clearance, and irrigation construction (where it occurred) varied. Under such circumstances, households adopted different strategies for rice production according to their capital resources and social connections. Many households either engaged in slash and burn agriculture on nearby slopes and/or planted local varieties of rice in the areas set aside for the community. Other families "borrowed" land under various sharecropping arrangements with relatives or people in neighbouring communities. Many returnees were not able to produce enough rice and had to make up deficits with rice allotments, cash assistance, overseas remittances, embroidery sales, and/or wage labour. Some families, however, were able to use such resources to buy more productive land from neighbouring villagers soon after arrival. In some communities, UNHCR provided supplemental rice allowances for 1-4 months on a one-time basis in response to specific conditions.

70. Vegetable production and other crops have also represented an important source of food for home consumption as well as cash income to make up rice deficits. The degree to which households and individuals engage in vegetable production along with, or in lieu of, rice cultivation highlights several important factors affecting the way households allocate available land, labour, and capital. First, the availability and quality of land is important. For example, in Ban Xaichaleurn, where the productivity of land is high relative to labour inputs, a number of families produced vegetables for home production and sale. One reason is that the irrigation water was sometimes insufficient for even subsistence rice production, which induced households to produce more vegetables relative to rice.

71. Second, the allocation of household labour is conditioned by gender and the productivity of labour relative to other activities. For example, women tended to be more involved in vegetable production and marketing, while men were more involved with land preparation for rice cultivation. In Ban Pha Thao, women were more actively engaged in embroidery production, which appeared to offer a better return on their labour than did vegetable farming. In Ban Kong Kham, men found it more profitable to

sell labour in Thailand and/or engage in charcoal production and sawing wood than to clear additional land.

72. Third, the location and modalities of marketing farm produce also influenced production decisions. In Ban Thong Phiang Vilay, merchants from as far away as Vientiane came directly to the village to purchase vegetables. In this sense, the demand for farm produce has played a large role in stimulating production. Meanwhile, in Ban Namthong Tai, residents reported that the high costs of transportation precluded their ability to compete with other communities that are more favourably situated to the markets. As a result, they tended to produce rice and vegetables solely for home consumption.

73. Fourth, knowledge about what will grow in certain areas highlights the importance of agricultural training and extension services. For example, in Ban Thong Phiang Vilay, residents reported that the vegetable seeds and agricultural training provided by Consortium were timely and appropriate. In Ban Saysomboun, people indicated that an agriculturalist from Concern helped increase yields by locating higher yielding seed varieties. The village leader there also explained that he was able to market vegetables and fruits that he grew using techniques that he learned in the camps in Thailand.

Integrative linkages

74. Returnees have employed a variety of strategies to (a) gain access to and maintain control over key factors of production, and (b) allocate capital and household labour resources. The degree to which such strategies lead to successful reintegration outcomes depend on the strength and vitality of the linkages that connect returnees and their communities to Lao society at large. In the following section, I briefly summarize some of the more salient aspects of economic, social, political, and administrative linkages that enable returnees to form such connections.

Economic linkages

75. The most important activities have included (a) buying and selling land, livestock, agricultural products and handicrafts as well as (b) labour exchange, employment, and obtaining access to credit and other forms of investment capital. Remittances from families overseas have played a particularly significant role in providing many returnees with alternative sources of investment capital. In this sense, individuals in communities such as Ban Thong Phiang Vilay, Ban Xaichaleurn, and Ban Saysomboun appeared to be well integrated into local, regional, and national markets for rice, vegetables, and livestock. Communities such as Ban Thong Phiang Vilay and Ban Pha Thao also appeared to be remarkably well-integrated into international markets (particularly the US) for handicraft sales, including embroidery and silver jewellery. While the preferred outcome is for households to have sufficient resources to produce their own livelihoods, some families have had to sell labour in order to make ends meet. For example, in Ban Kong Kham, many men migrate to Thailand seeking employment and/or saw wood for people in nearby villages. In Ban Namthong Tai and other villages, people who are not able to produce enough rice earn money to supplement household diets with agricultural employment in other communities.

76. It is also important to note that in all the villages several individuals used cash payments, overseas remittances, and/ or embroidery sale to invest in various small business start-ups such as smithing and carpentry that provided services within their own community as well as nearby communities. Of equal importance were those businesses engaged in buying and selling dry goods and household products, which indicated more complex and longer-term relationships with suppliers in other communities in terms of capital mobilisation and credit. These and other such activities highlight several important factors that contribute to positive reintegration outcomes. First, it suggests that functional markets for such goods existed in and around returnee communities. Second, it suggests that returnees have been able to travel freely among different locations. Third, it highlights the role that entrepreneurship plays in the early formation of the new communities.

Social linkages

77. Returnee individuals and families have been able to engage in various types of social activity according to their respective cultural heritages and traditions. For example, both Hmong and Yao communities reported that they were able to conduct important ceremonies such as marriage, funeral, and holidays following traditional practices. Such ceremonies have included exchanging visits with relatives and friends from other communities. In some cases, family members from other communities had relocated to returnee communities, while other members had left for other returnee communities or elsewhere. Moreover, individuals reported receiving visits from relatives from overseas and, in one case, having made an overseas visit. Local family connections have also played a key economic role in terms of providing cash credit and employment opportunities as well as lending rice and land. It is also obvious from the significant role that remittances played that many families engaged in considerable correspondence with relatives and friends in the US and other countries. In this sense, the family and/or clan are one of the most important and enduring socio-economic institutions promoting sustainable livelihoods for returnees.

Administrative and political linkages

78. The large group settlement strategy meant that entirely new communities have had to be incorporated into the administrative and political structure of the Lao government. For example, in the returnee communities, the first village chief was always a community leader from the refugee camps in Thailand whose role and status was recognized by the Lao authorities. According to Lao law, however, the village leader must be elected from a slate of candidates according to a fixed schedule every two years, and in all returnee communities such elections have been held according to schedule. In some cases (e.g. Ban Saysomboun), the village chief has been routinely re-elected since the community was founded. However, in Ban Xaichaleurn the original village chief was voted out of office in the first election the community held. All other villages reported that chiefs had changed for a variety of reasons, the most common of which was that chiefs resigned and did not seek re-election. In some communities elderly traditional leaders were replaced by younger leaders, due in part to a greater emphasis placed on Lao language literacy.

79. Another example of political linkages concerns the Lao Women's Union's effort to establish village chapters soon after a new community was founded. As a mass party organization, village chapters are supervised by the district LWU, which in turn is

connected to the provincial and national LWU. However, most village chapters do not receive any financial support from the district, and as a result are limited in the kinds of activities and they can undertake. They nevertheless represent an organizational innovation new to the community that seeks to give women some degree of voice in local affairs. For example, LWU members vote for their local leaders from a slate of candidates, and in all cases there has been subsequent changes in the original leadership. In some villages, such as Ban Pha Thao, the NGOs have tried to use the LWU to implement certain project activities such as credit and animal banks. Such projects appear to have lost energy and focus following the NGO's departure, which reflects the relative weakness of such organizational entities during the early phases of community formation.

Social service and development linkages

80. In many respects these types of linkages are related to the administrative linkages between the new communities and the district and provincial levels of government. Social service linkages primarily concern public health such as potable water, primary and emergency health care, and public security while development linkages concern primarily vocational training, credit, crop and livestock extension services, irrigation, and infrastructure such as communications and roads. It is an unfortunate, yet common, characteristic of many communities in rural Laos that (1) such services do not exist or are not easily available, and (2) when introduced, they are not often sustainable. UNHCR and its partner organizations have devoted considerable time and attention to training personnel and putting into place institutions designed to promote sustainable service provision at the community level. However, many of the institutional inputs are deteriorating after just a few years. For example, there are: (1) high attrition rates among VLAs in the face of ambiguous demand and poor supplies; (2) Water User Groups that do not collect user fees; (3) gravity-feed drinking water systems that have ceased functioning; (4) health dispensaries with inattentive staff and few medical supplies; and (5) irrigation systems with structural problems.

Summary

81. Returnees have employed a variety of strategies to gain access to and maintain control over the factors of production necessary for self-sufficient income generation. These strategies involve inputs and resources over which UNHCR has (1) a great deal of control (e.g. cash payments and rice allotments); (2) little or no control (e.g. overseas remittances and income from embroidery sales); and mixed degrees of influence (e.g. camp incomes, land distribution, irrigation). The strength and weakness of integrative linkages have a great deal to do with the sustainability and equitability of reintegration inputs and outcomes.

Sustainability

82. The strongest integrative linkages appear to be those economic and social linkages that involve activities returnees can undertake within the context of their own socio-cultural norms and economic organization. In this sense, the most sustainable forms of self-sufficient livelihood production are those that involve the ability to (a) invest in farm inputs and small business start-ups and (b) market farm produce and handicrafts. In this regard, the most important inputs from UNHCR and other outside

organizations are those that put investment resources directly into the hands of individual returnees and households and/or provide unfettered access to markets and public goods. These inputs include the rice allotments that provide a cushion of subsistence during the initial period of capital mobilization and investment, initial cash payments, productive land, and infrastructure such as roads.

83. On the other hand, the weakest linkages in terms of sustainability are those technical inputs that require ongoing financial support and organizational structures that are introduced from outside the socio-economic and political context of the communities and/or rely on indigenous institutions unfamiliar with such activities. Such technical inputs include irrigation systems, drinking water projects, health care centres, and crop and livestock extension services. The organizational inputs include water user groups (WUGs) and VLA networks introduced by NGOs and IOs and the local LWU chapters introduced by the Party. In all cases, long term sustainability requires financial arrangements and competent third party management, both of which require organizational structures that are transparent and accountable to users and/or members.

Equitability

84. The rate of social stratification at which individuals within specific communities are differentiated according to socio-economic status and political power has been compressed into a remarkably brief period of time relative to nearby communities. This process appeared to be most pronounced in the communities of Ban PhaThao and Xaichaleurn, least so in the villages of Ban Namthong Tai and Ban Kong Kham. Similar kinds of outcomes are replicated on a larger scale when one looks at the process across group settlements. For example, some communities such as Ban Pha Thao, Ban Xaichaleurn, and Ban Namthong Tai have received irrigation assistance, while other, including Saysomboun, Ban Kong Kham, and several of the Htin villages in Sayaboury have not. It appears, then, that residents within and across different group settlements have benefited unequally from such inputs.

85. The reasons for variable access to such inputs are of course complex and have to do with a variety of factors, including technical feasibility of certain kinds of projects (e.g. irrigation) and the availability of resources at a particular time from various sources (e.g. overseas remittances, donor assistance). Within the community, it also has to do with the nature and manner of how reintegration and other forms of assistance are allocated. Those who are in leadership positions or who are close to leaders because of family or clan connections may receive preferential treatment. Across communities, donors are sometimes able to exert a considerable degree of influence concerning the type and amount of assistance that one group or community receives relative to other groups. In this sense, then it is important to consider how the assistance provided by UNHCR, the GOL, and partner organizations contributes to the formation of differentiated social structures in the group settlement sites.

Conclusion

86. The Lao case illustrates the constraints and opportunities involved with group repatriation in rural circumstances where (a) agriculture is the principle mode of production (b) government services are chronically weak and inconsistently available, (c) there are no local NGOs and relatively few international organizations, and (d) social connections (e.g. family and clan) form the primary basis for accumulating and then

allocating economic resources (e.g. land, labour, and capital). These factors, coupled with the changes in the macro-economic environment and regional and international relations, as well as ongoing domestic tensions, have played a major role in shaping UNHCR's repatriation and reintegration strategies in the large group settlements.

87. At first glance, the network of integrative linkages appears to be potentially dense in terms of the scope and scale of inputs provided by UNHCR and collaborating organizations to establish viable communities. However, weak government capacity and the dearth of viable development institutions at the local level suggest that many forms of assistance are ultimately unsustainable and destined to eventual collapse. In order to fill such gaps in the integrative network, many returnees have relied on informal social networks, assistance from UNHCR and partner organizations (e.g. cash grants, food, agricultural inputs), and alternative capital resources (e.g. camp savings, overseas remittances, income from handicraft sales) to invest in agricultural production and small businesses. These investments include, inter alia, the purchases of land, large and small animals, handtillers, rice mills, and the construction of fishponds. In this sense, many returnees have been able to adopt entrepreneurial strategies to develop and maintain viable livelihoods.

88. In terms of policy and planning under such circumstances, the most effective forms of reintegration assistance are (1) individualized packages that place productive assets directly into the hands of returnees, and (2) collective inputs that enhance, or compliment, the independent activities of returnees and promote goodwill among neighbouring communities (e.g. schools, potable water, roads). Given UNHCR's focus on short term interventions, these observations suggest that UNHCR and its collaborating partners would do better to (a) by-pass civil administration as an implementing partner when appropriate, (b) avoid introducing complex institutional arrangements that are new to communities - unless they (i.e. UNHCR) are able to commit to nurturing such institutions over an extended period of time, (c) pro-actively, yet cautiously, incorporate private sector institutions into the reintegration process (e.g. private contractors, markets), and (d) in limited cases, directly implement assistance such as cash assistance in support of vocational training for specifically targeted individuals.

89. The Laos case also highlights the fundamental nature of the division of labour between UNHCR and the State when the GOL's lack of financial and human resources inhibited its capacity to work effectively as an implementing partner for specific kinds of reintegration projects. Active collaboration with the GOL was nevertheless crucial in terms of its contributions for maintaining certain conditions that promoted positive and sustainable reintegration outcomes. First, the GOL played a key role in facilitating the modalities of repatriation, including documentation and the distribution of repatriation assistance. Second, the GOL was ultimately responsible for identifying and then preparing potential sites for large group settlements. The most important function in this regard concerns the provision of adequate land and resolving land rights disputes involving returnees and neighbouring individuals. Third, the GOL has played an important role in establishing macro-economic and development policies that structure the institutional framework governing rural production and trade. Fourth, the GOL continues to be responsible for providing human resource inputs such as salaried teachers for schools. Fifth, the GOL also continues to be responsible for guaranteeing that returnees have access to national protection and enjoy their full rights as citizens on a non-discriminatory basis.

90. The unsustainability of certain reintegration inputs as well as variable reintegration outcomes within and across communities raises questions about the availability and distribution of scarce repatriation and reintegration resources on several levels. First, it raises questions about site selection, project planning and implementation, and the degree to which UNHCR can and should commit itself to working toward more sustainable and equitable outcomes. Second, it raises questions about the degree to which project planning and protection monitoring is subject to outside pressure through donor interest and internal pressures from the government. Third, it raises questions about the constraints and opportunities UNHCR faces in terms of the socio-economic and political context in which it makes strategic choices concerning operational partnerships.

91. The Laos case also raises important questions concerning the timing of project completions and phase-out strategies. Involvement with many returnee communities has had a tendency to drag on in many cases, in part due to UNHCR's need to maintain a rationale for continued access for protection monitoring. Phase-out strategies have also been difficult to formulate because of the episodic nature of the repatriation process. Such strategies are also difficult to implement because the GOL will not be able to sustain project inputs, and as result, work in reintegration communities will have to be continued by former and/or current partners, or new organizations. This situation presents UNHCR with a vexing dilemma concerning its own role. On one hand, long-term involvement with various returnee communities may reinforce their status and identity as returnees in their own eyes as well as those of the government and neighbouring communities. On the other hand, current political tensions that potentially affect certain ethnic groups among the returnees underscore the need for ongoing protection monitoring and further work in areas such as human rights and refugee legislation, even as UNHCR phases down its operations.

Viet Nam

92. During the period, 1989-1997, UNHCR, in collaboration with the government of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam (SRV), successfully repatriated 110,000 Vietnamese refugees from camps and detention centers in Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines and Japan. This number included over 95,000 individuals who returned via the Voluntary Repatriation Program (VOLREP) and 14,000 cases repatriated via the Orderly Repatriation Program (ORP).

93. The greatest number of cases were concentrated in Quang Ninh and Hai Phong in the North, Hue and Danang in the central region, and Ho Chi Minh City in the South (see Table 1). In most cases, individuals and households were repatriated back to their original points of departure. Originally, each returnee received a one-time cash payment of USD360, later amended to USD240. Adult returnees were also eligible for a variety of social services, the most important of which included vocational training and credit for small-business start-ups. Extremely vulnerable individuals and groups (EVI/Gs) included unaccompanied minors (UNAMs), single mothers and their children, and people with special health needs. Such cases received special assistance and follow-up monitoring.

94. A Memorandum of Understanding with the government of SRV governed UNHCR's work. UNHCR's implementing partner in the government was the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids, and Social Affairs (MOLISA), which was responsible for coordinating all aspects of the repatriation and reintegration work at the national and local level. MOLISA was also responsible for coordinating repatriation and reintegration work with the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Public Security, as well as mass party organizations (e.g. the Viet Nam Women's Union). MOLISA also coordinated reintegration work by other international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which either worked under contract with UNHCR (e.g. the Norwegian Assistance for Returnees Programs), or with their own funds (e.g. European Union, Consortium).

95. UNHCR maintained its head office in Ha Noi and a sub-office in Ho Chi Minh City in the South where a significant number of returnees were repatriated. UNHCR at one time employed as many as 60 staff in both locations, including six-seven Vietnamese-speaking international workers as well as national staff. UNHCR staff conducted extensive protection monitoring, administered the implementation of Micro-Projects and the work of NGOs contracted by UNHCR, and collaborated with other international organizations.

96. In the following pages, I focus on the repatriation and reintegration work in four of the largest areas of returnee concentration where the field visits were conducted. These areas included both rural and urban locations in Quang Ninh and Hai Phong in the North, Hue in the central region, and Ho Chi Minh City in the South. In Section 2, I identify some of the more important strategic factors that have affected UNHCR's work in these areas. In Section 3, I discuss, albeit briefly, the circumstances of flight and camp residency. In Section 4, I summarize the main components of UNHCR's reintegration

work in Vietnam, as well as the work of collaborating organizations. In Section 5, I then look at various integrative linkages that promote positive reintegration outcomes and comment on the sustainability of inputs, the equitability of reintegration outcomes, and phase out plans. In Section 6, I conclude by summarizing some of the more important features of the Viet Nam case.

Strategic factors

97. Several important social, economic, and political factors have affected the scope, scale, and pace of UNHCR's repatriation and reintegration work in Vietnam. First, the overwhelming majority of returnees left Viet Nam seeking better economic opportunities for themselves and/or their children. Poverty, few opportunities for gainful employment, and a lack of confidence in the future were the root causes pushing people to migrate from both urban and rural areas throughout the country. As a result, the key objective guiding the reintegration efforts was to help create more sustainable employment opportunities for returnees.

98. Second, UNHCR had a long-standing history of work in Viet Nam on a variety of issues pertaining to protection and project implementation. These included (a) assistance to internally displaced persons (1973 - 1987); (b) the Orderly Departure Program (1979 - 1991); (c) assistance to Cambodian refugees (1979 - 1994); and (d) emergency assistance to Cambodian refugees of Vietnamese origin (1993-94). These activities helped promote mutual understanding between the government and UNHCR, and established a solid foundation for collaboration during the CPA.

99. Third, the socio-political space most commonly referred to as "civil society" is somewhat constricted in the sense that non-governmental organizations are not permitted in the country. However, international NGOs and international organizations have been accorded a wider range of activities since the beginning of the 1990s, though they are expected to follow certain administrative procedures when working with local institutions (e.g. People's Committees; Viet Nam Women's Union). Nevertheless, community development techniques using "participatory" techniques are often viewed as confusing, time consuming, and ultimately intrusive.

100. Fourth, the government of Viet Nam and associated Party organizations such as the Viet Nam Women's Union, as well as banking institutions, are relatively strong in their capacity to deliver a variety of services to people at the local level. In institutional capacity, the administrative structures and procedures are fairly well defined, though somewhat cumbersome. In human capacity, officials at all levels appeared to be for the most part competent and motivated to carry out the work. As with many developing countries, though, the financial capacity for providing public services was significantly constrained. As a result, UNHCR provided substantial levels of support in the form of administrative overhead, office equipment, capital inputs, and transportation.

101. Fifth, the repatriation and reintegration process became a sort of litmus test by which Viet Nam was judged and accepted by the international community. At the outset of the CPA process in 1989, relationships among Viet Nam, regional countries of first asylum, and countries of resettlement were characterized by misunderstanding and suspicion. Over time, all parties recognized that their mutual self-interest required a resolution to a variety of bi-lateral and multi-lateral issues, including the refugee problem. Consequently, the Vietnamese authorities at the highest level made the successful repatriation and reintegration of returnees a matter of top priority.

102. Sixth, the repatriation and reintegration process was highly charged politically due to the circumstances regarding the Viet Nam War and the subsequent refugee flights to countries throughout the region. A number of non-governmental organizations as well as regional and Western governments took special interest in this process. Such interest was generally manifested in terms of funding for specific aspects of the reintegration process and advocacy on behalf of specific groups of returnees, particularly with respect to protection monitoring. In this sense, UNHCR worked under very close international scrutiny throughout the entire CPA period, and beyond.

Circumstances of flight and camp residency

103. The degree to which the above factors have affected the repatriation and reintegration process were in turn influenced to varying degrees by two additional factors that relate more specifically to camp residency and repatriation planning. First, people who left different geographic regions of Viet Nam ended up in different countries either by design or accident. In flight, people often experienced considerable hardship and personal trauma from pirate attacks, inclement weather, and insufficient water and rations. The camp situations in each country varied according to the policies and practices of the host countries. In some case, such as the detention centers in Hong Kong and Thailand, conditions were particularly difficult. Services were largely confined to shelter, daily subsistence, and medical care. For the most part, formal education and other forms of training were not provided and there were few opportunities for employment. As a result, many people used what savings they had to supplement daily subsistence. Time spent in camps, which for many people spanned five years or more, was essentially lost for many people in terms of promoting positive reintegration outcomes.

104. Second, the open-ended resettlement policies of Western countries from 1975 through the late 1980s encouraged people who later fled to believe they also would be resettled in third countries once they reached a country of first asylum. Many people who were eventually screened out for resettlement resisted voluntary repatriation in the hopes that they would eventually be resettled somewhere. They were especially susceptible to periodic rumors that swept the camps suggesting that third country resettlement remained a viable option. Moreover, people sometimes provided misleading or factually inaccurate information during the screening process in the hope of improving their chances for resettlement. Such rumors and misinformation undermined efforts by UNHCR to plan and implement repatriation in a more timely manner. As a result, the repatriation efforts extended over a much longer period of time and involved nearly 14,000 individuals who were repatriated under the Orderly Departure Program (ODP).

Reintegration

105. UNHCR's reintegration work in Viet Nam included four main components. First, UNHCR conducted extensive protection monitoring for cases of special concern. Second, UNHCR funded a total of 685 micro projects (MPs) throughout the country that were implemented by MOLISA. Third, UNHCR contracted a number of non-governmental organizations to provide support for vocational training (e.g. JVC in Hai Phong) and social services for EVI/G cases, such as unaccompanied minors (e.g. NARV). Fourth, UNHCR collaborated with other international organizations providing assistance for vocational training, credit, and EVI services (e.g. European Union). In this section, I will briefly review each of the components.

Protection and case monitoring

106. In protection and case monitoring, UNHCR's track record is impressive, especially given the early constraints and pressures under which the staff worked. In all, nearly 50% of repatriated individuals received at least one monitoring visit from UNHCR staff. In some cases requiring special attention, more than one contact was made. The monitoring process also entailed efforts to ensure returnees received treatment consistent with the CPA framework by the local authorities in areas where returnees were living. The primary issues concerning protection and monitoring included arrest cases, people and groups of special interest such as former South Vietnam government officials and the ethnic Nung in the South, and extremely vulnerable individuals and groups (EVI/Gs).

107. UNHCR's protection and monitoring work was complicated by several factors. First, there was close scrutiny from other governments, particularly the US, and NGO advocacy groups who were interested in a variety of political and human rights cases. UNHCR staff made extraordinary efforts to respond to such inquiries, which in cases such as arrests and ethnic group entailed extensive reporting in addition to the actual fieldwork. Second, the Vietnamese authorities maintained strict procedures regarding the conduct of monitoring visits. For example, early in the process, monitoring visits were often accompanied by a number of officials from different levels of the government. Over time, this kind of scrutiny tended to give way to more relaxed visits as officials began to understand the nature and intent of the monitoring visits. Third, in some cases returnees felt they had been unfairly screened out in the camps and/or had inaccurate expectations about the reintegration assistance to which they were entitled. This sometimes created an air of distrust and suspicion toward UNHCR. These three factors, when combined with other factors such as difficult travel requirements and heavy caseloads, contributed to the stressful conditions under which UNHCR worked.

108. Despite such constraints, the protection work carried out by UNHCR in Viet Nam may serve as a model for future protection work. One important factor contributing to this success is the fact that Viet Nam has codified laws and legal procedures governing civil and criminal offences. As in all countries, this does not necessarily guarantee complete impartiality and objectivity in the application of legal procedures. However, it suggests there is a recognized body of legal codes and precedents that provide a common point of formal reference and appeal. A second important factor is the role that trust and mutual understanding between the government and UNHCR plays in terms of establishing and maintaining protection and monitoring access. The fact that UNHCR employed international protection officers who spoke fluent Vietnamese – and in some cases, Chinese – and understood the structural and procedural norms governing such work in Viet Nam played an important role in this regard.

109. There are two additional observations worth noting concerning the extent of the protection and monitoring coverage. First, the pressure from outside interest groups pushed UNHCR to both expand and concentrate more of its monitoring efforts on special cases of concern. Under such circumstances, there was a danger that (a) fewer resources in terms of staff time could be devoted to monitoring more routine cases, and (b) certain EVI cases received less intensive follow-up than required. Second, at the same time, the actual number of returnee cases that received visits of one kind or another was actually higher than the figures reported by UNHCR because of the involvement of other organizations. It appears, however, that communication with UNHCR by other organizations concerning such visits was inconsistent.

110. Three approaches were used by UNHCR, MOLISA, and collaborating organizations to help the returnees establish and maintain sustainable livelihoods: vocational training, access to credit, and special services for EVI cases.

Vocational training

111. UNHCR and its partner organizations provided considerable inputs to MOLISA's Vocational Training Centers (VTCs) in areas with the greatest concentration of returnees. In all, some 100 projects were implemented in this sector, 42 of which were financed by UNHCR. The VTCs were originally designed in the early 1990s to provide Vietnamese with skill training and job counseling in response to the rapidly changing economy that was evolving as a result of the economic reforms (Doi Moi) then underway. However, many of the VTCs lacked resources and were only able to provide a small number of vocational training courses for low-entry level employment. UNHCR, the European Union's EURAP project, and several NGOs provided financial and material assistance to the VTCs in order to build up physical plant and provide equipment for the training courses. This assistance enabled the VTCs to provide vocational training for a substantial number of returnees in jobs such as auto mechanics, driving, electrical repair, hairdressing, and machine sewing. The VTCs also provided job counseling and referred people to both public and private sector enterprises for employment.

112. Three points are worth mentioning about the VTCs' capacity and role to promote positive reintegration outcomes for individual returnees. First, the VTCs were routinely located in urban areas, which initially reduced their availability to returnees in rural areas. In some areas, such as Hue, the VTCs provided temporary accommodation for returnees from rural areas. Also, the provincial MOLISA in Hue set up "satellite" VTCs with mobile groups of instructors providing training in nearby districts. Second, a significant number of returnee women received training at the VTCs. The course offerings and subsequent enrollment often reflected the fact that many occupations in Viet Nam, as elsewhere in the region, tended to be divided according to gender. Some VTCs reported, however, that an increasing number of women, including returnees, were enrolling for training in sectors traditionally occupied by men. Moreover, some courses such as computer programming and languages tended to be more mixed in terms of gender composition. Third, in addition to financial and material resources, the effectiveness of the VTCs depended on their ability to plan course offerings, recruit appropriate instructors, and link trainees with relevant jobs in a rapidly changing job market. In this sense, some VTCs appeared more innovative than others in establishing new connections with emerging private sector enterprises rather than relying solely on traditional relationships with public sector enterprises.

Access to credit

113. The second component of the reintegration strategy focused on providing returnees with access to credit for small-business start-ups. The most important credit programs were the ECIP (EC International Program, 1991-94) funded by the European Community, and the EURAP (EU Refugee Assistance Program, 1996-99) financed by the European Union. The ECIP provided loans to 30% of returnee families who had arrived at that time, while RAP made nearly 5,000 loans that reached 14% of returnee families. The ECIP and EURAP projects relied on the official banking system to implement the loans. Other organizations also provided various kinds of credit programs. For example, Consortium implemented a small credit project in collaboration with the VWU in Ho Chi

Minh City. This programme provided no-collateral in-kind inputs that returnees were required to pay back according to a specified repayment schedule.

114. During the ECIP, the banks required significant levels of collateral to secure loans and established fairly strict and difficult repayment schedules. In some cases when a business failed, the returnees defaulted on loan repayments and lost their collateral. During RAP, procedures were amended, bank staff were trained in investment appraisal, and new regulations regarding collateral requirements were clarified. One reason for the apparent limited RAP coverage was the fact that bank branches in HCMC, Hanoi, Da Nang and other cities were not inclined to lend to returnees. In some instances, bank officials required an unofficial fee before processing the loans, which also may have inhibited some returnees from applying for loans. Despite such problems, a significant number of returnees benefited from the various credit programs available to them.

Extremely Vulnerable Individuals/Groups

115. The Extremely Vulnerable Individuals/Groups (EVI) cases that were of particular concern for UNHCR and collaborating organizations were (a) physically and mentally ill; (b) single-women heads of households; (c) survivors of violence; and (d) unaccompanied minors. Generally, EVI cases were flagged in the camps prior to repatriation so that UNHCR was prepared to conduct monitoring visits and make referrals in a timely manner following their return. Additional EVI cases were identified in the course of routine monitoring visits by UNHCR and other organizations, including local VWU chapters, MOLISA, and the EURAP.

116. UNHCR referred approximately 1,825 EVI cases to EURAP between 1996 - 1998, and the VWU referred another 710 cases in the final year, 1998-99. The EURAP services for EVI cases included: counselling and advice; housing allowances for 200 cases; medical insurance for all EVI/Gs; support for specialized medical care for 1,5000 EVI cases not covered by medical insurance, and additional support for small business start-up kits, disability aids, and grants to cover vocational training fees.

117. Over 4,500 unaccompanied minors were repatriated, most of who returned to live with immediate or extended family. In some cases, UNAMs were repatriated with "significant care providers" with whom they resided in the camps. After housing, the main priorities for UNAMs concerned schooling, vocational training, and employment. UNHCR contracted with NARV to provide services for UNAMs between 1992 to 1995. NARV assisted approximately 3,500 UNAM cases with modest financial support, health care, and counselling. NARV conducted several training courses for its Vietnamese fieldworkers and MOLISA/DOLISA counterparts. NARV also provided assistance for various micro-projects, including the construction and renovation of several schools.

Micro-projects

118. UNHCR devoted substantial time and financial resources in support of 685 Micro-Projects (MPs). The total amount of financial assistance for these projects was approximately USD14.7 million. Local authorities and people also contributed to the MPs in terms of financing and labour. The primary rationale for these projects was to provide social services and infrastructure for returnees and the communities involved as well as generate goodwill on the part of communities where returnees were repatriated. The

majority of projects provided infrastructure (e.g. short spans of roads, footbridges) and social services (e.g. schools, health dispensaries).

119. The procedures used to administer the MPs appear to have been remarkably efficient despite the number of administrative step involved. All projects were initiated at the commune level by the People's Committees according to UNHCR guidelines and under the supervisions of the Department of Labour, Invalids, and Social Affairs (DOLISA). The district and provincial People's Committee reviewed each project and then forwarded approved proposals on to MOLISA and UNHCR for final approval. Once a project was approved, UNHCR transferred funds for either one project or a group of projects directly to DOLISA's bank account, which in turn transferred installments to specific contractors according to UNHCR and MOLISA guidelines. Contracts for construction projects were awarded on the basis of competitive bidding that was open to both private and public sector enterprises. In the small number of projects visited, most contracts were awarded to public sector enterprises. The turn around period between proposal and completion was routinely within one year.

120. The success of the MP process in Viet Nam, with the speed and number of projects completed relative to administrative costs, suggests that under the right institutional conditions (e.g. a strong implementing agency), such projects can indeed be efficiently implemented. However, the approach used in Viet Nam raises several important concerns regarding certain aspects of the MP model. First, it raises questions about planning methodology and project selection. It appears there was not much scope for direct participation by community members in identifying and selecting projects. It is important to consider (a) who owns responsibility for the project and (b) how efficient community participation actually is, especially given that participatory methods are often more time consuming and labour intensive. Second, it raises questions about the desired number of returnees who actually benefited from the projects relative to the costs of the project. The MPs were initially targeted in areas where a significant number of returnees had repatriated. UNHCR later expanded the MPs to include poorer areas with fewer returnees where the potential for illegal departure might be high due to poverty. Third, it raises questions about sustainability. The scope and scale of the total number of projects completed with UNHCR funding, in addition to all the other projects funded by the EURAP, NARV, and other organizations, represents a potentially significant burden in terms of maintenance and repairs. Such responsibilities will have to be assumed primarily by the local governments and people, though it is not clear how such work will be planned and financed in the future.

121. Finally, the above questions raise an additional question concerning project monitoring and evaluation. The monitoring process on the part of UNHCR appeared to have been thorough in carrying out administrative reviews at specific junctures of the process. However, it does not appear that independent evaluations were conducted at any point in time that objectively examined the planning and implementation process, the actual number of beneficiaries, the sustainability of projects, and other factors. Given the fact that UNHCR devoted substantial resources for the MPs, a more rigorous mid-term and post-term evaluation process would seem warranted. Such evaluations, however, must be planned prior to implementation in full consultation with implementing partners so that (a) evaluative criteria are already in place, and (b) partners understand the process ahead of time.

Inputs from international organizations

122. Several other organizations provided relief and rehabilitation projects for returnees during the CPA period. For example, World Vision provided assistance to returnees from the Hong Kong camps. The projects were carried out in 21 various communes in Hai Phong, Thua Hue, and Quang Nam Danang provinces. There were three project components: grants for small business enterprises; grants for wells, cisterns, and latrines; and school scholarships for both returnees and local people provided on a 50/50 basis.

123. In addition to its work on credit, Consortium worked with the VWU and DOLISA to provide a variety of services to returnees in the Ho Chi Minh area. There were four components to their services: credit and savings; micro-business enterprise training; agricultural training for rural borrowers upon request, and specialized services for EVI cases, particularly disabled and single mothers.

Integrative linkages

124. The above survey suggests that UNHCR, international organizations, and the SRV government provided a substantial level of services for returnees and their communities. The degree to which these inputs promoted successful reintegration outcomes depended on the strength and vitality of the linkages that connected returnees to their families, communities, and Vietnamese society. In this section, I briefly summarize some of the more salient aspects of the social, economic, and administrative linkages that enable returnees to sustain such connections.

Social linkages

125. The primary social linkages have involved the returnee's families. In many cases, returnees had divested themselves of all assets to finance their departure, taking whatever savings they had with them. In some cases, returnees transferred property, including land and/or houses, to relatives, while others lost such property when it was later appropriated by the government. As a result, when individuals and families were repatriated, they often returned to the homes of their parents or extended family members where they received shelter and help with daily needs. In many interviews, returnees reported giving at least some of their cash assistance to their families to help with household expenses and repairs. Many returnees continued to reside with family members long after they were repatriated.

126. Returnees for the most part appear to have been either well or indifferently received by the communities they returned to. In cases such as the ethnic Hung and Chinese in and around Ho Chi Minh City, fishing communes in Hue, and certain communities in Quang Ninh, where the number of returnees was high, their status as returnees was not unique. Another factor that appears to have promoted positive relationships within the community was that returnees did not receive large benefits that distinguished them from their neighbours. In this sense, the Micro-Projects played a prominent role in promoting good relationships as community members also received some benefits from the repatriation process.

127. Another important set of social linkages involved education and training. For example, most children were able to attend school fairly promptly after their family's return. The main problem that some children had in terms of acceptance and adjustment

was that they may have missed several years of school which sometimes led to age discrepancies within classes. For older children this could be especially difficult, and some quit school because of it. In vocational training, some returnees were segregated in certain VTC courses early in the reintegration process. However, this approach was later amended in favour of including returnees in classes with other people.

Economic linkages

128. The most important economic linkages in both the urban and rural areas have been employment and access to loans for small-business start-ups. In some cases, returnees have been able to use their original skills to find gainful employment. Many others, though, required training in new skills that were more relevant to the local labour markets that have been evolving in the context of the newly emerging market economy. Other returnees have relied on their own entrepreneurial talents to start-up new businesses with loans they obtained through the various credit projects. In this sense, the methodology and implementation procedures used to provide credit are important factors that can either promote or inhibit successful reintegration outcomes.

129. Perhaps the strongest set of economic linkages is provided by those services that connect vocational training with job counseling and/or access to credit. For example, many (if not all) of the VTCs provided courses in small business management. Such training helped some returnees plan how to use bank loans more effectively. The effectiveness of such linkages ultimately depends on (a) the strength and vitality of the national and local economy, (b) the quality of information that service providers make available, (c) the ability of VTCs to effectively anticipate future trends in the labour market and plan accordingly, and (d) the ability of the VTCs to forge relationships with newly emerging private sector enterprises.

Administrative linkages

130. The institutional structure of Vietnamese society has had a significant impact on the repatriation and reintegration process. According to Vietnamese procedures, individuals and households must have family books (ho khau) and proper identification in order to find jobs, gain access to vocational training, or obtain credit. Such documents can only be obtained from the Commune People's Committee in one's community of origin. This meant that returnees had to return to their original points of departure in order to obtain proper documentation and receive cash assistance. ¹ It also meant that returnees had a specific address and local reference point, which enabled UNHCR to locate specific cases for protection monitoring.

131. The SRV government has proven to be relatively strong in terms of its capacity to deliver a variety of administrative services to returnees at the local level. For example, the commune People's Committee routinely provided returnees with their family books and ID cards within a two-month period upon arrival. They also routinely provided children born in the camps with birth certificates, which are necessary for school registration. The cash assistance payments were administered by MOLISA and were also made available to returnees within a reasonable period of time. In some cases, information about vocational training and credit programs was provided to returnees when they received cash payments.

Social service linkages

132. The SRV government is also relatively strong in its institutional capacity to provide social services in education, health, and welfare. Generally speaking, such services are more readily available in urban areas than in rural areas where resources are particularly scarce. The Viet Nam Women's Union has also proved to be capable of providing services to specifically targeted individuals, particularly women. For example, in Hai Phong the VWU managed a small-scale credit programme and provided vocational training support for women. They also provided counseling support for women who were experiencing difficulties in making adjustments back to Vietnam. In Ho Chi Minh City, the VWU implemented a small credit programme for returnees and helped monitor EVI cases. In terms of staffing, both the government and the VWU employed a number of women with expertise in various areas. For example, the VWU in Hai Phong, employed a woman trained in law who helped women with civil cases in court and a woman trained as a social worker at Ho Chi Minh City's Open University.

Summary

133. UNHCR, the SRV government, and other international organizations have effectively collaborated to create a dense network of social, economic, and administrative linkages that have, for the most part, promoted positive reintegration outcomes. The strength and weakness of integrative linkages has a great deal to do with the sustainability and equitability of reintegration inputs and outcomes.

Sustainability

134. The three most important factors that promote sustainable reintegration outcomes are families and other social support networks, governing institutions at the local level, and the local and regional economies. The degree to which such linkages promote positive and sustainable reintegration outcomes therefore often depends on the nature and strength of the family and the financial and technical capacity of the government and related organizations (e.g. VWU) to provide a wide range of social services. For example, the potential sustainability of micro-project inputs is strengthened by the financial contribution from local authorities as well as inputs, such as labour, from local people. Finally, reintegration outcomes – primarily in employment – are dependent on the performance of local and regional economies over time. This in turn depends on how local and regional markets for finance, labour, and services are affected by national macro-economic policies.

135. Conversely, the strength and vitality of such integrative linkages are undermined by structural and procedural gaps that cause individual returnees to fall through the institutional cracks. For family connections, such gaps are exacerbated by (1) financial stress, particularly among low income families; (2) social stress, particularly where a single woman heads a household, and/or where there are special health needs; (3) lack of information about available services; and (4) an inability or unwillingness to access government services. For administrative connections, such gaps are exacerbated by (1) scarce resources in financing and human capacity; (2) lack of information about particular cases; and (3) competition for services from other people and groups.

Equitability

136. Equitability of reintegration inputs in terms of cash assistance and access to social services does not, of course, result in equitable reintegration outcomes. In a socio-economic and cultural environment as complex Viet Nam, there are simply too many intervening variables beyond UNHCR's control or influence that lead individuals and families along different reintegration paths. However, inequitable access to social services – for whatever reason – can certainly be a contributing factor leading to inequitable reintegration outcomes. Probably the most significant area over which UNHCR exercises some degree influence concerns its capacity to help people to connect administrative and social service linkages. This is especially true in cases where returnees are discriminated against on the basis of their returnee status, or in situations where EVI/Gs, such as single mothers, fall through the gaps in the institutional framework. In this sense, the monitoring of both routine and EVI cases can be strengthened by better communication between (a) UNHCR staff working in camps and receiving countries, and (b) UNHCR and collaborating international organizations.

Phase-out

137. UNHCR has phased down its operations in Viet Nam over the past two years since the last remaining CPA cases were repatriated, and now maintains a three-person office in Ha Noi. The staff currently handles protection cases and responds to other refugee or returnee matters as they emerge. The staff also conduct various workshops for government officials concerning refugee-related matters and works to promote human rights and refugee migration legislation. It is also important to note that by maintaining its office in Ha Noi, UNHCR is well positioned to respond to new situations that may arise, particularly the many thousand cases of Vietnamese of Chinese descent who are currently residing in southern China.

138. UNHCR's phase out strategy was greatly facilitated by the ability and willingness of the Vietnamese government to assume responsibility for the returnees. In this sense, it is important to note that the SRV government and the VWU have articulated that returnees are no longer thought of as individuals eligible for special services based on their returnee status. Rather, they are considered Vietnamese citizens who, like everyone else, may be eligible for social assistance provided they meet the required criteria. For example, the government operates several national poverty reduction programs aimed at providing assistance for the poorer members of society. In the case of the national credit programs, people in a particular commune must collectively decide who is most in need of such projects. In several cases, returnees who had applied for such loans reported the community had chosen others who were much poorer. Though this may raise questions concerning the degree to which people in local communities may discriminate against returnees in the future, I think it has more to do with local people's collective sense of fairness.

Conclusion

139. The case of Viet Nam highlights several factors that contribute to sustainable reintegration outcomes for individuals and families repatriating to urban and rural environments. It is a good example of the important role that strong, central government institutions with extensive administrative reach to the local level can play in promoting positive reintegration outcomes. The Vietnam case also illustrates the important role that

international organizations and NGOs – especially in the absence of local NGOs – can play in providing specifically targeted reintegration assistance for women and EVI/Gs, such as unaccompanied minors (UNAMs). The Viet Nam case is also interesting in that it suggests how the institutional structure of society can support positive reintegration outcomes. For example, the fact that individual and families required family books (ho khau) to obtain repatriation assistance and reintegration services meant that people had to repatriate to known addresses. Among other activities, this enabled UNHCR protection officers to locate returnees.

140. UNHCR, the GOV, and other international NGOs together established a dense network of economic and administrative linkages that enabled returnees to integrate back into Vietnamese society. The network of integrative linkages was further strengthened by families, which provided many returnees with housing and other support upon their return. In this sense, UNHCR's inputs (e.g. cash assistance) enabled returnees to contribute to families who provided shelter and daily subsistence. Collective forms of assistance also played a significant role in promoting positive reintegration outcomes. The two most important have been support for Vocational Training Centres and Micro-Projects (e.g. schools, infrastructure) provided by UNHCR and other international organizations. Support for these activities directly benefited both returnees and their neighbours, and as a result, helped create goodwill on the part of other people in the community. Another critical area of reintegration assistance concerned credit schemes for small-business start-ups. The European Union worked through official banking institutions to provide credit to a large number of returnees, while international NGOs such as Consortium worked with the Viet Nam Women's Union to provide additional returnees with credit.

141. For policy and approach, this case interestingly suggests that when the network of integrative linkages is densely interwoven, large amounts of direct assistance (e.g. cash and/or in-kind) may not necessarily be required in order to achieve sustainable reintegration outcomes. Rather, when government institutions are sufficiently strong and complimentary services are well-targeted by collaborating organizations, the most efficient and sustainable forms of reintegration assistance are (1) services that require individual returnees, including EVI/Gs, to access the local administration for services and (2) small scale micro-projects that benefit returnees and their neighbours. In situations similar to Viet Nam, therefore, the bulk of reintegration assistance can be administered through government institutions and other collaborating organizations. This in turn can enable UNHCR to concentrate more resources on (a) monitoring to ensure returnees have access to national protection and appropriate services, and (b) more ongoing attention on human rights and refugee legislation.

142. The case of Viet Nam also underscores the important role that countries of first asylum play in either promoting or inhibiting positive and sustainable reintegration outcomes following repatriation. In this sense, many first asylum countries adopted policies and practices that effectively prohibited (a) formal education and non-formal vocational and literacy training, as well as (b) employment opportunities in which camp residents could learn new skills and possibly save money for investment after repatriation. Such services during the period of camp residency would seem more conducive to promoting durable solutions given that economic factors associated with poverty and a lack of employment prospects were the primary motivation pushing people to migrate in the first place. In this sense, the time spent in refugee camps and detention centres was lost for many individuals and their families.

143. Finally, the work of UNHCR raises several important questions. First, what are the implications for UNHCR's work when the State plays such a significant role in terms of protection and monitoring and project implementation? For example, what are the implications for project evaluation and long-term sustainability of inputs? Second, how does UNHCR prioritize its work, particularly protection monitoring, in the context of intense external scrutiny and internal constraints? Third, how can UNHCR help minimize the institutional gaps through which certain returnees fall, especially women and EVI/Gs? Fourth, how can UNHCR play a more proactive role in promoting policies and practices that enable camp residents to better prepare for repatriation and reintegration?

Cambodia

144. There have been two major repatriation and reintegration operations in Cambodia over the past decade. During the first operation in 1992-93 (Repat 1), UNHCR and collaborating organizations successfully repatriated some 362,000 people back to Cambodia. During the second operation in 1997-99 (Repat 2), UNHCR and collaborating organizations repatriated some 46,000 people back to Cambodia. Each operation took place under different international and regional circumstances and assumed a different set of dynamics with respect to internal socio-economic and political circumstances. Though the two operations are indeed discrete events and for analytical purposes are treated as such, they are in fact inextricably connected with one another as key components of a longer-term process of social and political reconciliation after years of civil war and social upheaval.

145. An important question is how well did the experiences and lessons learned in Repat 1 inform Repat 2? This question merits more extensive attention than I have been able to devote to it in this study. Given time limitations, I decided, in consultation with concerned staff, to focus attention on Cambodia's Repat 2 for the field research and the comparative analysis with Laos and Viet Nam. In the field, I visited Samlot and Anlong Veng, but was unable to go to Trapaeng Prasat and Samraong as planned because of heavy rains.

146. In Section 2, I briefly review some of the more salient factors and circumstances that affected UNHCR's work in Repat 1 to identify lessons for the comparative work with Laos and Viet Nam and with Repat 2. In Section 3, I discuss repatriation work and survey the reintegration assistance provided by UNHCR and its partners. In Section 4, I identify and discuss some of the key cross-cutting themes and issues concerning UNHCR's work in Repat 2. In Section 5, I discuss the social, political, and administrative linkages that have connected returnees to each other, their community, and Cambodian society at large. I then conclude in Section 6 by briefly highlighting some of the main aspects of UNHCR's work in Repat 2.

Strategic factors

147. Several important social, economic, and political factors have affected the scope, scale, and pace of UNHCR's repatriation and reintegration work in Cambodia. First, the circumstances of flight and camp residency in both Repat 1 and Repat 2 have been primarily political in nature. In Repat 1, people first fled Cambodia during the Khmer Rouge (KR) regime; many more than fled in the wake of the Vietnamese invasion in late 1978/early 1979. In Repat 2, people fled as a result of fighting between (a) Khmer Rouge factions and (b) government coalition parties. In both Repat 1 and Repat 2, people resided in camps along the Thai-Cambodia border under the control and direction of various political factions.

148. Second, in Repat 1 the camp population was more diverse in its social and demographic composition. It included people of both urban and rural backgrounds and all levels of social strata from many areas of the country. Many resided in the camps for

long periods of time, including those under the age of 15 who had been born and raised in the camps. In Repat 2, the overwhelming majority of refugees were farmers and former soldiers and their families from the Khmer Rouge controlled areas, or petty traders, farmers, and soldiers and their families from the FUNCINPEC controlled area (e.g. Samraong). These people resided in the camps for a much briefer period of time (i.e. one and a half years maximum). It is notable that some people in the Repat 2 groups had also resided in camps before Repat 1.

149. Third, the social contexts varied dramatically in Repat 1 and Repat 2. In Repat 1, Cambodia was just embarking on a series of social economic and political reforms that were to have far reaching effects on Cambodian society. The scope and pace of such reforms were further accelerated during the UNTAC period. One area in particular concerns the UN's work educating people all over the country about political and human rights in preparation for the 1993 elections. The number of international NGOs had greatly expanded since the 1980s, but local NGOs were only beginning to form. Meanwhile, a market economy was emerging after years of centralized planning and cooperative agricultural production as Cambodia moved from an era of emergency reconstruction to a new era of development.

150. By Repat 2, the structure and composition of civil society had changed dramatically. There were more international organizations and NGOs working in the country, and a plethora of local organizations. Thus, the quality and quantity of specialized services had increased, including human and political rights advocacy. There is currently a remarkable degree of religious tolerance, a freer press openly discussing a broad range of issues, and a variety of political parties of different persuasions competing for electoral power. Such changes, however, have only tangentially affected people in the KR areas. The primary importance of an expanded civil society has been to increase UNHCR's strategic options for feasible partnership alliances with NGOs and other organizations.

151. Fourth, the international context had changed dramatically by the second operation. Repat 1 took place in the context of an agreement brokered among the four predominant Cambodian political factions by Western and regional countries. Western governments played an important role in designing the framework in which people were to be quickly repatriated in time to participate in the May 1993 elections. In this respect, there was a greater sense of shared responsibility for the outcome of the repatriation process. Repat 2 only really involved Thailand. It also did not receive the level of international attention and scrutiny given to Repat 1, Laos, or Viet Nam. In this sense, UNHCR had more latitude and control over how it approached the repatriation and reintegration work in Repat 2.

152. Fifth, in both Repat 1 and Repat 2, the Cambodian government's capacity to implement administrative and social services in support of reintegration was inhibited by a debilitating scarcity of public resources and weak civil administration, particularly at local level. While important progress was made in other areas, the civil administration was weak and often ineffective in the Repat 2 reintegration areas, which remained outside the government's control until recently. This factor, when combined with the parallel growth in the number and diversity of international organizations and local NGOs, played a key role in shaping UNHCR's current reintegration and phase-out strategies.

153. Sixth, to support such a large operation in Repat 1, UNDP and UNHCR established the UNDP/OPS project CARERE to help coordinate and implement the

reintegration projects in areas most significantly affected by the repatriation. UNHCR made substantial financial contributions to CARERE's early work, and the relationships between the two organizations in Repat 1 serves as a good example of the important role that UN interagency cooperation can play in complex operations. Since 1996, CARERE has worked more in the area of administrative capacity-building to promote more decentralized development planning and implementation under the Cambodian government's SEILA program. Repat 2 also required close cooperation between the two organizations, with the primary focus on planning and coordination. Despite their increasingly different missions, overlapping objectives in Repat 2 reintegration areas made a more limited partnership both feasible and fruitful.

154. There are three additional interrelated factors concerning Repat 1 that have pertinent lessons for other operations. The first factor is the important role that land plays in rural people's repatriation options and promoting durable reintegration. In Repat 1, the first contingency plans assumed that land would be available (e.g. 2 ha//household). However, it soon became apparent that such land was either (a) heavily landmined, and thus unusable for safe repatriation, (b) located in areas where conflict continued, and/or (c) already occupied. The overwhelming majority of people then chose the cash assistance option, including those wishing to return to an urban area, so that they could return to Cambodia as quickly as possible.

155. Second, people were transported from the camp to five different reception centers where they declared their intended destinations and received assistance in the form of transport and cash assistance (USD50/adult; USD25/child). The coordination of the logistical arrangements for this operation was one of UNHCR's greatest successes. Many people, however, did not proceed to their declared destination, or once there, migrated elsewhere. As a result, many people were lost to protection monitoring.

156. Third, one of the difficulties that returnees faced following repatriation was a poor reception from local residents who had remained in Cambodia. A common perception was that people who had resided in the border camps had enjoyed privileges and opportunities that others had not. Returnees were also often viewed as competitors for scarce resources (e.g. land, jobs). Their status as landless returnees with few resources has made them especially vulnerable during the recent period of rapid socio-economic change. For example, Repat 1 returnees now represented a substantial proportion of the rural landless who migrate both internally and across neighbouring borders in search of land and/or employment.

Repat 2: Camp residency and repatriation

157. UNHCR maintained its head office in Phnom Penh and opened two field offices in Battambang and Siem Reab. A third field office in Sisophon, which coordinated the Repat 2 reception centre and work in Banteay Mean Chey, was closed in June 1999. The Battambang office set up a local base in Samlot after repatriation, as did the Siem Reab office in Anlong Veng. This decentralized administrative structure facilitated communication and promoted cooperation with local government officials and collaborating organizations. Meanwhile, head office staff coordinated work with donors, the head offices of local partners, and the national government as appropriate.

158. There were seven repatriation areas. The Battambang office oversaw repatriation and reintegration work in Samlot and Veal Veng (Pursat). Residents in these areas returned from Chong Khao Phlu camp in Trat, Thailand. The Siem Reab office

oversaw efforts in Odtar Mean Chey province (e.g. Samraong, Anlong Veng, and Trapaeng Prasat districts) as well as Banteay Mean Chey province. Residents in Samraong had returned from Huey Cherng camp in Surin, Thailand, while people from AV and TP returned from Phu Noi camp in Sisaket, Thailand. The seventh area was in the Northeast provinces of Rattanakiri, Mondulakiri, Stung Treng, and Kratie, where some 3,500 people – most from various ethnic minority groups – returned from Phu Noi. Repatriation and reintegration work in these areas was coordinated from UNHCR's Phnom Penh office.

Circumstances

159. In each situation, people were forced to quickly abandon homes and land when fighting broke out in their respective areas in 1997 - 1998. People were able to take with them only those possessions and cash that they could carry or otherwise transport. While in the camps, people received support for basic needs (e.g. food and health services) from UNHCR and various NGOs. In the Khmer Rouge controlled camps (e.g. Chong Khao Phlu and Phu Noi), the degree to which people had opportunities for trade and/or employment varied according to local circumstances and the factional leadership. In Chong Khao Phlu, some people were able to engage in petty trade and find employment, while in Phu Noi such opportunities were less available. In Huey Cherng, some people, particularly petty traders, were able to engage in more extensive trade and some people found ways to earn money from other sources (e.g. weaving thatch). Generally speaking, though, people returning from Phu Noi had fewer individual resources than those returning from either Chong Khao Phlu or Huey Cherng. Many people from the latter two camps returned with some savings and equipment that could be used for home construction, agricultural investment, and supplemental food purchases.

160. It is also important to note that in each of the camps, residents and their leaders possessed varying degrees of capital equipment acquired prior to flight. In Samlot, for example, the Khmer Rouge leadership controlled 10-wheel trucks, bulldozers, large tractors, and hand-tillers. When fighting broke out, people fleeing to Thailand were able to take a significant proportion of this equipment with them as well as livestock, oxcarts, and vehicles. While in the camp, many people sold their livestock to supplement food rations and purchase other items. They returned, however, with most of the original inventory (minus livestock), which was used for reconstruction and agricultural production. For many people without access to handtillers, the absence of large animals affected their ability to prepare land for cultivation.

Repatriation

161. In Repat 2, there were three modes of repatriation from the camps in Thailand. Each process involved different circumstances that eventually affected UNHCR's reintegration work. First, there was voluntary repatriation of individual cases and small groups. UNHCR, in conjunction with Thai authorities, organized transportation for returnees from Huey Cherng (starting in October 1997), Chong Khao Phlu (starting in May 1998), and Phu Noi (primarily ethnic minority groups repatriating to the Northeast) to Poipet in Sisophon province. From Poipet, returnees were then transferred to Kang Va reception centre by the Cambodia Red Cross (CRC), contracted by UNHCR. At Kang Va, returnees received household kits and food rations (see below), and then proceeded to their final destination with CRC support or by private transportation. People repatriating

from Phu Noi to the Northeast were first transported to Phnom Penh where transportation by boat up the Mekong to their final destination was arranged by the CRC.

162. Second, UNHCR facilitated the voluntary repatriation of larger groups directly from Chong Khao Phlu camp to their original communities in Samlot and Veal Veng. In these cases, returnees traveled from Chong Khao Phlu to a reception center at O Ta Teak (Samlot) to receive household kits and food rations from the CRC. They then proceeded to their respective final destinations. On both parts of the journey, UNHCR provided returnees with modest cash grants to arrange their own transportation. It is interesting to note that this mode of repatriation enabled returnees who owned pick-up trucks and other means of transportation to earn income by providing transportation to other returnees. This represents yet another way in which some returnees were able to accumulate savings that could later be used for home improvements and/or investments in agricultural production or small business start-ups.

163. Third, subsequent to the repatriation of groups to the Northeast, the remaining refugees in Phu Noi camp, which involved Khmer Rouge cadre and their families, returned on their own to Anlong Veng (AV) and Trapaeng Prasat (TP) districts in January 1999. This spontaneous repatriation caught everyone on both sides of the border off guard and left UNHCR and collaborating organizations with little time for advanced planning. This factor, coupled with the extremely difficult access, accounts for the delay - by UNHCR and its partners - in delivering repatriation assistance immediately upon their arrival. The WFP and CRC should be commended for their efforts to transport emergency and household kits to these people as quickly as circumstances permitted.

Food Assistance

164. The World Food Programme (WFP), in consultation with UNHCR, determined the food component of repatriation assistance. In Repat 1, returnees received a 400-day rice ration. In Repat 2, returnees received a 40-day rice ration, despite UNHCR's arguments that at least 80-90 days of rations represented the minimal requirement. The rationale for the discrepancy between these two operations has been explained by a WFP official in the following terms. First, returnees in Repat 1 spent much longer periods of time in the camps and as a result faced more difficult reintegration challenges (e.g. lack of land and connections to community). Second, prior to Repat 2, excessive amounts of rice were initially provided to camp residents because of inaccurate estimates of the resident population. Third, there were large numbers of IDPs in the Repat 2 areas for whom WFP was responsible for providing food assistance (e.g. Samlot, AV). WFP's reconciliation objectives required that they provide the same amount of food assistance for both returnees and IDPs. Fourth, WFP did not provide more than 40 days of food rations for both groups because of the need to maintain some degree of consistency with assistance provided elsewhere in Cambodia. Finally, in order to provide returnees with supplemental rations to cover possible food deficits, WFP also distributed additional rice on a food-for-work basis. For those returnees who faced emergency situations but could not participate in FFW projects (e.g. certain EVI cases), WFP provided supplemental food allowances through Cambodian Family Development Service (CFDS) and, most recently, Cambodia Vision in Development (CVD).

165. In terms of reintegration, such relatively modest food rations, when compared to repatriation assistance provided in other rural settings (e.g. Laos and Cambodia Repat 1) may have retarded agricultural investment. For example, returnees who did not participate in FFW schemes, or even for those did but still did not have enough rice,

would have to use savings and/or borrow rice in order to cover rice deficits until their first harvest. These savings could have otherwise been used for investment in agricultural production or other reintegration tasks. Moreover, those returnees who participated in FFW projects may have had to divert labour away from agricultural production or other forms of employment to work on the projects.

166. It is important to observe, though, that in cases where such tasks involved agricultural inputs, home improvements, or public works, important work was indeed accomplished. In this sense, FFW projects can be a useful way to provide people with needed food while motivating them to carry out certain tasks. Nevertheless, such projects represent a reduction of investment flexibility on the part of returnees. Moreover, such projects may discriminate against people who, for one reason or another, do not participate. In the longer-term context of refugee reintegration, including operations that involve large numbers of IDPs, a more constructive approach would be to provide people with sufficient rice to see them through their first harvest as well as provide supplemental rice with FFW projects. Such an approach would be more equitable and would promote more sustainable reintegration outcomes by strengthening people's capacity to invest in the early phases of agricultural production.

Socio-political organization

167. The experience of the Khmer Rouge groups illustrate the role that socio-political structure and organization can play in promoting and inhibiting repatriation and durable reintegration outcomes. The Khmer Rouge have, over the years, specialized in the controlled movement of their own cadre - soldiers and their families - under arduous circumstances. Such experiences have, in a perverse way, made them uniquely adaptable to the difficult repatriation circumstances they faced in Repat 2. For example, returnees in both Samlot and AV reported that the circumstances of repatriation were not much different from their previous experiences migrating from place to place in mountainous and jungle environments. As a result, they knew how to work together to quickly establish temporary shelters and forage in the jungle to compliment subsistence food rations.

Reintegration

168. UNHCR's approach to decentralized planning and implementation with local partners enabled field staff to effectively manage reintegration assistance under complex circumstances. This was particularly true in Samlot and Veal Veng where staff had adequate time to plan, and people were repatriated under more controlled circumstances. In AV and TP, the situation was more difficult because of the spontaneous nature of the repatriation and exceptionally difficult access. In all areas in the Northwest, UNHCR and CAREERE collaborated to make detailed needs assessments concerning the reintegration needs and approaches. In Samraong, UNHCR also funded a socio-economic needs assessment conducted by ZOA and a local research organization.

169. The approaches used to promote reintegration, therefore, varied from site to site according to the mode of repatriation, the time for planning, political dynamics, access, and agricultural resources. Nevertheless, several concerns arose about protection and monitoring in reintegration areas (i.e. ensuring that returnees were not discriminated against for their status as refugees or political affiliation). In the following section, I briefly review some of the most important protection and monitoring issues as well as

some of the more important inputs and services that UNHCR provided through its Battambang and Siem Reab offices. I will then conclude by identifying two important cross cutting problems and issues concerning the organization of UNHCR's reintegration work in both areas.

Protection and monitoring

170. Protection and monitoring have been especially important priorities for UNHCR given (a) the highly politicized circumstances under which people initially fled and then repatriated, (b) the danger to returnees and other individuals posed by the ubiquitous presence of landmines, and the number and nature of cases involving extremely vulnerable individuals and groups (EVI/Gs). To promote citizenship rights and equal access to local resources, UNHCR has adopted a dual approach: On one hand, field officers have intervened with local government or military officials to resolve individual cases of discrimination. UNHCR has also adopted a more comprehensive approach by contracting with a local human rights organization, ADHOC, to conduct human rights training with local government officials, police, and people at the grassroots. ADHOC has offices based in Siem Reab, Battambang, and Samraong, which facilitated its access to the reintegration sites in both Otdar Mean Chey and Samlot.

171. Land rights have been one of the most vexing problems concerning human rights and equal treatment. Such problems were most pronounced in AV and TP where many returnees lost their original land to pro-government factions and IDPs, and in Samraong where land grabbing by government military personnel or business interests (e.g. O'Smach casino), sometimes sanctioned by local authorities. As with other protection cases, UNHCR adopted a dual approach to address conflicts over land rights. In many cases, land rights disputes were managed on a case-by-case basis in which UNHCR has, whenever feasible, involved either local or provincial officials in resolving specific cases. At another level, UNHCR also adopted a more comprehensive approach by contributing to the development of institutional mechanisms for governing land rights. For example, in Battambang UNHCR supported the development of a Land Use Planning Unit (LUPU) as well as a Land Dispute Resolution Committee. UNHCR also referred several protection cases involving land disputes to ADHOC for follow-up with local authorities. UNHCR also played a pro-active role in advocacy and providing information. For example, UNHCR produced two reports on land tenure in the reintegration areas and participated in a meeting with the National Land Dispute Resolution Committee over the O'Smach casino where several returnee household were forced to relocate elsewhere.

172. Landmines have been a ubiquitous problem in nearly all returnee areas. In addition to obvious concerns for the safety of returnees and other local people, land mines have impeded UNHCR's monitoring access and the ability of partner organizations to implement their reintegration projects. Land mines have also played an important role in land rights disputes as returnees and others compete over land that is free of land mines. UNHCR contracted with both international and local agencies in each of the areas (e.g. Cambodia Mine Action Centre (CMAC) and the Mine Advisory Group (MAG) in Samlot; Halo Trust in Otdar Mean Chey) to clear mines in and around public areas (e.g. schools, water wells, and health facilities) and promote public awareness about safety in areas that are heavily mined. In Samlot, nearly 30% of the operating budget has been devoted to landmine clearance.

173. Extremely Vulnerable Individuals and Groups (EVI/Gs) included female heads of households, physically and mentally handicapped individuals (e.g. former soldiers and civilians injured in landmine explosions), people with acute or chronic illnesses, and extremely destitute individuals and families.

174. In late 1997, UNHCR contracted a local organization, Cambodia Family Development Service (CFDS), to follow up on known EVI cases and identify new cases. At that time, CFDS appeared to be the only specialized agency in Cambodia able to target EVI cases in the reintegration areas. CFDS was responsible for (a) providing counseling and advice; (b) providing special assistance, such as agricultural inputs, livestock, shelter materials, and supplemental food rations; (c) referring individuals to other service providers and/or to UNHCR in cases involving protection issues; or (d) some combination of the three. This work was especially difficult in Anlong Veng and Trapaeng Prasat because of the spontaneous repatriation and the fact people were scattered over large areas. Moreover, CFDS's access to many areas in Odtar Mean Chey and Veal Veng was inhibited by poor infrastructure, especially during the rainy season. In late 1999, UNHCR - following consultation with CFDS - employed a consulting social worker to provide training and conduct an assessment of CFDS's work. The assessment observed that the procedures for identification and follow-up on certain EVI cases were inconsistent, and recommended actions to improve management and service delivery. Some of the recommendations were not acceptable to CFDS and they decided to terminate their relationship with UNHCR in early 2000. Given the time constraints, it was not possible to identify another provider, and responsibility for EVI cases fell to UNHCR field staff.

175. Though it is unfortunate that such situations arise, UNHCR must be commended for its efforts to monitor CFDS's work in order to ensure quality control of services for EVI/G cases. UNHCR may avoid similar situations ahead of time by (a) assessing an organization's capacity to provide services in a particular context, (b) working with the service providers to address jointly identified training needs, and (c) clarifying the monitoring criteria and assessment procedures prior to establishing a contractual relationship. UNHCR could also contract with more than one such agency to avoid over-reliance on just one agency (such as one agency per field office). This is easier said than done, though, as multiple service providers are rarely available in such situations.

Battambang

176. In addition to demining, UNHCR focused on providing basic infrastructure, social services (e.g. education, health), and agricultural inputs in Samlot and, to a lesser extent, Veal Veng in Pursat. UNHCR's early access to these areas was inhibited by ongoing fighting and related security concerns. UNHCR staff made effective use of the interim time to obtain information about local circumstances, make detailed plans, and establish contacts with local leaders and organizations. As a result, UNHCR was relatively well-prepared when it finally gained access to the reintegration areas. Nevertheless, travel conditions impeded safe and easy access until certain roads and bridges were demined and rehabilitated. Travel to Veal Veng remained especially difficult, and UNHCR staff have had to travel there via Pursat town on certain missions.

Infrastructure

177. UNHCR financed the improvement of access roads (e.g. culverts) and the rehabilitation or construction of bridges. These inputs have been important in facilitating service delivery and strengthening linkages with local and regional markets as well as improving communication between Samlot and Battambang. UNHCR also contributed funds through the Provincial Rural Development Committee (PRDC) for transportation, communication and office equipment, tools, and culverts for road improvement.

Education

178. UNHCR contracted with Action Nord-Sud (ANS) to construct and furnish schools in Samlot and Veal Veng, as well as distribute school kits and uniforms and conduct teacher training. Teachers in Veal Veng receive salaries, albeit low, but in Samlot – teachers were newly recruited from the area without proper training and do not yet receive salaries. Like many other schools in Cambodia, teachers must rely on modest fees to make ends meet. UNHCR financed Enfants Refugies du Monde (ERM) to operate "animation centers" to provide structured activities for school-age children. UNHCR also financed the Pursat PRDC to build four three-room schools and provide teacher training.

Potable water

179. UNHCR contracted a local NGO, DEEP, to provide technical inputs for borewell construction in Samlot and Veal Veng. Each well is designed to serve 20-30 households in a given area and, for the most part, are conveniently located along the roads. At each well site an attractive signboard stands with a public health message in Khmer language. Each well is managed by a committee of four nearby users, at least one of them a woman. The committee is responsible for keeping the well area clean and basic repairs.

Health

180. UNHCR supported the Provincial Department of Health (DoH) to build a TB and malaria ward in Samlot. UNHCR contracted Emergency, an organization originally dedicated to assisting mine victims, to provide a variety of primary and preventive health services, including malaria treatment. Health care is free in Samlot, despite the fact that health workers do not receive salaries from the government. Emergency currently provides them with a living allowance. In Veal Veng, UNHCR financed the Pursat PRDC to construct and equip one wooden health post and one wooden health center. Unfortunately, the health post is not used because the Pursat DoH is unable to finance the operations and there are no alternative means of outside support.

Agricultural inputs

181. The Cambodia Red Cross, with UNHCR funding, provided seed rice for returnees. Some people reported that the rice seed varieties were inappropriate for the area and, as a result, their rice production was low the first year. The resulting food deficits had to be made up with savings or WFP FFW rice. UNHCR contracted ANS to provide returnees with tools and 10 kg of vegetable seeds, including peanuts - the

primary cash crop in the area. ANS worked through its associate local organization Agricultural Development Action (ADA), which trained a number of local people to serve as grassroots extension agents. Each agent was provided with (a) tools, seeds, and training on how to maintain demonstration plots for promoting better vegetable production techniques, and (b) training and basic equipment to provide basic veterinary care and vaccinations for chickens.

Odtar Mean Chey

182. UNHCR's ability to quickly respond to the needs of returnees in Odtar Mean Chey was initially inhibited by (a) the spontaneous repatriation to Anlong Veng (AV) and Trapaeng Prasat (TP), and (b) exceptionally difficult access, particularly to AV and TP. At first UNHCR had to travel through Thailand via Samraong to gain access to AV and TP. (The recent completion of the road connecting Siem Reab to AV has dramatically improved access by UNHCR and other organizations to the area.) This meant the Siem Reab office had less time and information for advanced planning than did the Samlot operation. Initial services in AV, therefore, more closely resembled an emergency operation with the focus on providing food rations (e.g. WFP and the Cambodia Red Cross) and obtaining information. In the case of Samraong, the situation was somewhat more controlled given the planned repatriation process, but was similarly complicated because of inaccessibility, the scattered location of returnees, and ongoing conflicts over land. These factors also contributed to the reintegration process lagging somewhat behind those of Samlot. As in Battambang, UNHCR contracted a variety of organizations to provide a wide range of services in Odtar Mean Chey .

Infrastructure

183. UNHCR funded the rehabilitation and replacement of several bridges along Route 68 connecting Kralanh and O'Smach as well as Action Nord-Sud's (ANS) work to repair bridges between Kralanh and Ou Chik in Siem Reab.

Education

184. UNHCR funded ZOA's and World Learning/Consortium's efforts to build five-classroom schools in Kon Kriel (Samraong) and Trapeang Prei (AV) respectively. The Association for Aid and Relief, Japan (AARJ) distributed textbooks and school materials in both AV and TP, while World Learning/Consortium distributed education materials in TP. UNHCR funded UNICEF's work for curriculum development and teacher training in Siem Reab and conducted an assessment for emergency teaching supplies in all three districts.

Potable water

185. UNHCR contracted a local organization, Tuk Sa-ath, to plan and provide technical inputs for well construction in AV and TP. Tuk Sa-ath employed an approach similar to DEEP in Samlot in technology and community management. UNHCR also provided funds to ZOA for water well and water jar construction, and Action Against Hunger (AAH) for additional borewell construction in Samraong, AV, and TP.

Health

186. UNHCR financed the rehabilitation of a hospital in AV operated by Medecine Sans Frontiere (MSF), which provided primary, preventive, and emergency health care to returnees in AV. In Samraong, UNHCR also helped fund a clinic operated by Malteser Hilfsdienst Germany (MHD) that provided similar services in Kon Kriel Commune. In addition, UNHCR financed Consortium's (World Education) mosquito net distribution in TP through local schools. Tuk Sa-ath provided latrines for six schools in AV and TP. UNHCR funded UNICEF's child and women assessments and training in health, hygiene, and nutrition in four villages.

Agricultural inputs

187. UNHCR funded the distribution of rice and vegetable seeds and farming tools in Samraong, AV, and TP through World learning/Consortium and ZOA (which also provided household items to some families). UNHCR funded irrigation ponds and wells implemented by AAH in all three districts. AAH provided additional inputs, including farming tools and fertilizer. UNHCR also financed the OMC PRDC's project to improve food security with seed distribution and irrigation structures. UNHCR funded UNICEF's home vegetable projects in four communes.

Additional inputs

188. It is also important to mention the reintegration assistance that UNHCR provided in the Northeast and Banteay Mean Chey (BMC). As in other areas, CFDS initially provided short-term specialized assistance for EVI cases and CRC provided repatriation and reintegration assistance to returnees.

Stung Treng and Kratie

189. UNHCR funded Partners for Development who provided health education, household kits, mosquito nets, and rice banks within the context of their ongoing integrated community development programmes.

Mondulkiri

190. UNHCR helped the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) provide agricultural tools, rice and vegetable seeds, as well as reintegration and emergency assistance for EVI/Gs and local poor. This included household materials and supplies as well as tools. UNHCR also supported Médecins du Monde (MDM) in providing funds for transport, medicine for seven health centers, and upgrading a district health post.

Rattanakiri

191. UNHCR helped the Provincial Department of Agriculture provide small animals, rice and vegetable seeds, tools, and buffalo rental. World Concern International (WCI) also established six rice banks. In health care, UNHCR supported COERR with assistance for transportation and medicines. UNHCR also supported the Provincial Department of Rural Development to provide shallow wells that benefited both returnees and the local villagers.

Cross-cutting problems and issues

192. The complex nature of working with so many different service providers under such diverse circumstances raises several important problems and issues pertaining to external (e.g. managing local partners) and internal (e.g. staffing) organizational arrangements.

Managing local partners

193. UNHCR originally contracted the US-based NGO Consortium in July 1998 to coordinate reintegration projects with international and local NGOs. Procedures for working with local partners proved cumbersome in practice and inefficient in administrative costs. This arrangement was also difficult to manage under UNHCR's reporting requirements and required considerable management time. The arrangement was discontinued in December 1999 because it represented an unnecessary and complicating layer of bureaucracy that impeded UNHCR's ability to make services and inputs speedily available to returnees and their communities.

194. In situations involving large, complex operations (e.g. Repat 1), an intermediary organization (e.g. CARERE) may effectively coordinate other partner inputs, provided procedures are streamlined to allow speedy and adaptive responses to returnee needs. However, in smaller operations like those managed by the Battambang and Siem Reab field offices during Repat 2, decentralized and direct coordination with local partners is a more effective and efficient approach for managing reintegration services.

Staffing

195. Three points about staffing require special mention: First, many local Cambodian staff employed during Repat 2 in the field offices and the head office were returnees from Repat 1. This experience provided local staff with first hand knowledge and understanding of the repatriation and reintegration processes. The presence of so many former returnees on the staff also helped create an atmosphere of motivation and commitment within UNHCR.

196. Second, UNHCR made effective use of several Australian volunteer engineers from Red R, whose six-month tenures were funded by the Australian government. These engineers worked closely with UNHCR partners to provide useful support in technical planning and consultation and management oversight for many projects, including landmine clearance, school construction, potable water, and rural infrastructure (e.g. roads, bridges).

197. Third, UNHCR's employment of female field staff was inconsistent. The Siem Reab office had employed only one female international staff member as a Field Officer in early 2000 and a female Cambodia staff member as a field assistant. The Battambang office employed one female international staffer as a Field Officer in late 1998, but was not able to employ any local women. The recruitment of women for such positions is difficult for a variety of reasons, including (a) traditional cultural mores and social attitudes proscribing certain roles according to gender, and (b) the unavailability of women with requisite experience for such assignments. Indeed, the Battambang office had interviewed female candidates for field assistant positions, but found none were willing to spend nights in difficult and remote territory and that their general education and skill levels were lower than male candidates.

198. Such arguments are, nevertheless, ultimately unjustifiable if UNHCR intends to match the rhetoric of its gender policies with action in the field. This is an especially important protection issue because returnee women, especially those with low education and socio-economic status are often unable to access services. The recruitment and training of local women may be a time-consuming process that diverts some management time away from immediate tasks. However, deliberate efforts to hire and train local women would (a) expand returnee women's ability to access UNHCR protection, assistance and other services, and (b) make an important long-term contribution to capacity-building for women, especially in the area of human rights.

Integrative linkages

199. UNHCR's effective management and coordination with international organizations and NGOs, local NGOs, provincial and local officials, helped promote positive reintegration outcomes. Such collaborative efforts have enabled returnees to establish important economic, social, and administrative linkages that integrate them more closely with Cambodian society at large. This record of achievement is especially important in its contribution to the reintegration of the former Khmer Rouge leadership and cadre into mainstream society after decades of conflict and violence. An important aspect of this process has been the use of integration resources as an effective instrument to promote peaceful reconciliation. In this sense, UNHCR and its partners have helped demonstrate to former Khmer Rouge and other Cambodians that peaceful participation in mainstream society can help promote economic and social welfare. This does not suggest in any way that various political conflicts have been resolved. Indeed, many problems and issues remain to resolve, including (a) the demobilization of former Khmer Rouge soldiers following their recent integration into the Cambodian Armed Forces; (b) the trial of Khmer Rouge leaders; and (c) the government's difficulties in providing fair reintegration assistance to former Khmer Rouge cadre.

Economic linkages

200. The ability of returnees to establish sustainable livelihoods depends on their capacity to produce and market agricultural products and engage in small business start-ups and trade. In this sense, the development of agricultural production and marketing has many forward and backward linkages that help stimulate small business start-ups and petty trading. Such activities will provide further sources of income and employment for local people, but also require entrepreneurial talent and investment resources like access to credit. The ability of people to engage in such activities depends on their access to and control over available resources, the most important of which, after labour, are land and capital inputs.

201. The most significant contribution that UNHCR has made in helping returnees establish economic linkages are (a) agricultural inputs, including vegetable and rice seeds, tools, and materials, and (b) support for infrastructure development. This is especially so in the case of Samlot where UNHCR inputs enabled people to quickly produce vegetables and rice for home consumption and peanut crops for commercial sale. For example, outside merchants purchased and transported a significant portion of the peanut crop produced in Samlot to Battambang. People are also now investing in corn production, to be marketed in Battambang and eventually Thailand. These merchants may eventually provide cheaper credit than that currently available through informal local sources. Cooperative purchases of agricultural inputs and marketing are

feasible next steps for many local smallholder producers, provided they receive appropriate assistance in the near future (e.g. access to credit schemes with reasonable interest rates and payback schedules).

202. A similar set of linkages are now being developed in OMC, especially since the construction of the road that connects AV to Siem Reab. It is already apparent that investment from outside sources is underway given the growth of the market and small businesses in the AV district center. Meanwhile, Samraong has long been a local commercial center with close trade relations directed primarily toward Thailand. The improvement of roads connecting Samraong with Siem Reab and other districts in OMC will, over time, strengthen economic linkages in the area. However, problems associated with the construction of the O'Smach casino, in which people were displaced from their land, suggest outside investment may also have negative effects for disadvantaged people.

Social linkages

203. I think it is instructive to recall a preliminary observation from a current study concerning the Repat 1 caseload by the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS). The researcher observes that some Repat 1 returnees (excluding KR groups) have since formed new communities or subsections of other communities, often with returnees from the same camp. This illustrates the important role that group identity plays in shaping social linkages.

204. The primary socio-political linkages within the former Khmer Rouge communities have been structured both vertically and horizontally. In vertical linkages, individuals and families have been linked to various leaders according to the internal ethics and logic of patron-client relationships based on political and/or military order, affiliation, and loyalty. In horizontal linkages, individuals and families have been linked to one another through a strong sense of communal identity based on group solidarity and mutual protection honed by years of adversity. Social relationships, therefore, have been inwardly focused in that people's relationships with one another have been formed within the confines of a closed socio-political system that extend only so far as the family, neighbourhood, military unit, and local political leaders. As reintegration and reconciliation strengthen over time, the basis of group identity, and hence social linkages, will extend outwardly at a faster pace. Probably the two most important factors concern (a) economic trade and (b) migration by outside people into these areas to occupy farmland or engage in business and trade. One can already observe this process unfolding in Samlot and AV. In TP, Veal Veng, and the Northeast, this process will probably progress at a much slower pace due to the remote location and poor access.

205. The situation in Samraong is different because people's affiliation with FUNCINPEC was not as tightly controlled as with the KR. In many respects, then, social connections are more closely associated with social class and occupation, family, community, and military unit (e.g. soldiers and their families). This is especially true of outside traders swept up in the events of July 1997 almost by accident. The final comment concerns the ethnic minority groups from Phu Noi camp who repatriated to home communities in the Northeast. The powerful role that ethnicity and home play in affecting group identity is illustrated by the fact that some of these individuals had been away for 20 some years, and yet were often well received by their respective communities and extended families.

Administrative and political linkages

206. Local administrators throughout Cambodia are hampered by a debilitating lack of official resources, and as a result, must rely on informal fees and taxes to provide salaries for staff and public services. Formal administrative linkages thus are generally very weak. One important area concerns excruciatingly slow procedures required to grant formal land titles. This is especially so in Odtar Mean Chey, which was created as a new province in April 1999 with very little, if any, initial financing from the national government.

207. For informal political linkages, then, it is important to bear in mind that most returnee sites remain extremely politicized, and local political leaders have retained control over certain important functions such as public security and policing. As a result, a returnee's access to administrative and social services are governed – at least in part – by the ethics and logic of patron-client relationships based on political or military affiliation. For example, some local leaders have retained control over such resources as road construction machinery, hand-tillers, and large tractors. In the absence of formalized land titling procedures by the government, land rights are generally governed as a matter of local patronage. So a returnee's use rights are generally more secure when they are affiliated in some way with people who hold power (e.g. military personnel in Samraong; district authorities in Samlot, AV, and TP). The scarcity of public resources at the local level can, therefore, increase people's reliance on various political faction leaders and other patrons for protection and supportive services. The politicization of public services also occurs in places like AV where some inputs have been provided through political parties in the government, not the government itself. Probably the best examples of this are the schools the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) has financed in AV and the road they financed from Banteay Srei to AV in Siem Reap.

208. The Cambodian government's SEILA program, implemented in partnership with CAREERE, is designed to promote more effective local administration by improving accountability and transparency. This work builds on CAREERE's efforts to decentralize development planning in order to be more responsive to local needs. The system rests on a foundation of Village Development Committees (VDCs) that forward proposals to their Commune Development Committees (CDCs), which receive funds from Provincial Rural Development Committees (PRDCs). UNHCR has helped promote this system by working with the PRDCs in Battambang, Odtar Mean Chey, and Pursat. However, reintegration work results have been somewhat mixed due to the inexperience of staff and the weakness of the new administrative mechanisms and procedures.

209. Three remaining factors influencing administrative and political linkages are: (a) military integration and demobilization; (b) Khmer Rouge tribunals that currently remain under discussion, and (c) the upcoming commune council elections. An important element of the negotiated settlement between the various KR factions and the government has been integration of former KR military units into the regular armed forces of the Cambodian government. Current plans regarding the overall demobilization of the Cambodian armed forces will invariably affect many soldiers and their families in the reintegration zones. The KR tribunals represent a potential threat to local stability to the degree that local leaders will be affected by the process. As long as any such tribunal focuses on higher up leaders, the potentially disruptive and destabilizing influences (anti-linkages) at the local level may be minimized. The commune council elections could have extensive and far-reaching consequences in terms of people's access to administrative and development services. One important question

for UNHCR concerns the degree to which returnees are able to participate (e.g. vote or stand for office) in the upcoming commune council elections in February 2002 regardless of previous political affiliation.

Social Services

210. The lack of resources over which people have independent control, the scarcity of government resources, and the politicized nature of service delivery has increased people's reliance on outside organizations for services in the areas of health, public health, education, agricultural extension, and family welfare (e.g. FFW projects). UNHCR and its collaborating organizations have therefore made important contributions to promoting – at least for the short term – social service linkages by actually providing such services. I think it is also important to note that UNHCR's contractual relationships with various local NGOs has helped promote reintegration and grassroots reconciliation in the sense that such work brings Cambodians from other walks of life in direct working contact with former Khmer Rouge leaders and cadre. In this sense, people must learn how to cooperate with one another to resolve problems as they arise. These are essential social skills for long term reconciliation based on greater trust and mutual understanding.

Summary

Sustainability

211. The sustainability of administrative and political linkages is of course a function of a much larger historical process. In this sense, UNHCR's inputs have helped promote positive reintegration outcomes and lay the groundwork for reconciliation. On the other hand, the sustainability of its social service and agricultural inputs must be viewed in terms of the role UNHCR has played to promote the organizational sustainability of service providers. This ultimately is a question of resources. International organizations such as ZOA, MHD, Emergency, AAH, and ANS/ADA and others plan to continue working in these areas at least for some time using resources they raise on their own. In this sense, UNHCR could help former partner organizations establish contacts with potential donors. Other organizations such as UNICEF and UNDP/CARERE have already begun providing services in Odtar Mean Chey. As a result, these integrative networks may change in composition and profile, but will remain intact and possibly expand and strengthen as more agencies become involved in these areas.

Equitability

212. There has been some disparity in assistance devoted to certain areas. A great deal of this has to do with the circumstances of flight and repatriation (e.g. spontaneous vs. planned) as well as geographic access. The other important factor that has influenced reintegration outcomes in each of the areas concerns the variability of land quality and use rights. In Samlot (especially the north and central regions), the productivity of land is higher than in the other sites due to the fertility of the soil. Most people in Samlot were also able to return to their original land, even though their homes had been destroyed. In this sense, there have been fewer conflicts over land in Samlot than in other areas where (a) people's land was occupied by people from other groups who returned earlier (e.g. Anlong Veng) or (b) land-grabbing by more powerful people has occurred (e.g. Samraong). The productivity of soil and stability of land tenure in Samlot suggests that

the scope and scale for positive reintegration outcomes may be greater than other in areas, despite the presence of landmines in many areas.

213. It is therefore likely that Samlot will develop at a much faster pace and more expanded scope than any of the other areas – particularly VV and TP, which are located in more remote areas. This suggests, then, that at least in terms of economic linkages, Samlot as a whole may be better positioned to integrate with Cambodian society at a faster rate than other areas. However, it does not follow that people within the Samlot communities will integrate in the same way or at the same pace. Over time, disparities in socio-economic wealth and status will likely expand. The same process will also occur in OMC, though perhaps the gap between the powerful and the poor will widen even more quickly because of greater disparities in access to and control over productive resources.

Conclusion

214. Cambodia Repat 2 illustrates the constraints and opportunities involved with group repatriation in rural circumstances where (a) multiple modes of repatriation are employed, (b) various political factions compete over power and resources, (c) agriculture is the principle mode of production, and (d) government services are chronically weak and inconsistently available. These factors, coupled with emerging civil society in which several international organizations and local NGOs provide a variety of services, have played a major role in shaping UNHCR's repatriation and reintegration strategies.

215. UNHCR has collaborated with a variety of different organizations (e.g. UNDP/CARERE, international and local NGOs) to provide a fairly dense network of integrative linkages for protection monitoring, infrastructure, agricultural inputs, and social services. In this sense, UNHCR has made an important contribution to the longer-term process of social and political reconciliation in Cambodia after decades of civil war and social upheaval. UNHCR's efforts to help strengthen the civil administration by using PRDC's to implement certain projects, however, have produced mixed results. The sustainability of administrative linkages is undermined by the chronic weakness of the civil administration in the reintegration areas. To compensate for such shortcomings, UNHCR has provided initial funding for various partner organizations to initiate reintegration work in these areas and has encouraged them to remain involved after UNHCR phases out its operations. Meanwhile, UNHCR's protection work on specific land rights cases has been conditioned by the sober understanding that questions involving land tenure require a more comprehensive long-term solution.

216. For policy and planning under such circumstances, the most effective forms of reintegration assistance are (1) individualized packages that place productive inputs directly into the hands of returnees (e.g. tools, vegetable seeds), (2) collective inputs that enhance, or compliment, the productive capacity of returnees (e.g. roads) and provide important social services (e.g. schools, potable water, and health care), and (3) support – in cooperation with other agencies - for civil institutions promoting human rights and more secure land tenure arrangements. Given UNHCR's focus on short-term interventions, Cambodia's Repat 2 suggests that UNHCR should – in similar situations – work closely with other UN agencies, international organizations, and local NGOs whenever possible to provide reintegration services for returnees and their communities. UNHCR should avoid whenever possible using local governments as implementing partners to provide reintegration inputs when the administration is (a) inadequately staffed, poorly trained, and under financed, and/or (b) highly partisan. However, even

in highly politicized situations where the local administration plays an important role in areas such as enforcing land rights, UNHCR must be prepared to provide extensive protection monitoring and well-targeted support for institutional development.

217. Repat 2 also raises three important questions for managing reintegration assistance provided by international and local NGOs. The first question is about the most appropriate amounts and means of providing food assistance for returnees. In this case, WFP's policy of providing equitable amounts of food assistance for both returnees and IDPs in the context of its broader programming interests throughout the country conflicted with UNHCR's primary focus on the needs of the returnees. More information about such situations is required. UNHCR and WFP should consider conducting a joint assessment to determine the extent to which people have actually diverted savings and labour away from agricultural and other investments as a result of the 40-day ration policy. Such a study should also focus on the role that FFW projects actually play in helping people make up food deficits that stem from insufficient food assistance provided during repatriation, or for other reasons. Such a study could prove useful to both organizations in terms of planning future cooperative operations.

218. The second question concerns the most efficient and effective approach for managing partner organizations. In large complex repatriation and reintegration operations (e.g. Repat 1), intermediary organizations such as CARERE may provide the most effective and efficient oversight. However, in situations involving smaller groups of returnees, as in Repat 2, it may be more efficient and effective for UNHCR to directly monitor and manage partner organizations.

219. The third question concerns the most effective means of actually monitoring the performance of partner organizations. Prior to establishing a contractual relationship, UNHCR needs to objectively assess a potential partner's strengths and weaknesses and then provide clear criteria by which the organization's performance will be assessed. In situations where a potential partner may require additional support and training, UNHCR must consider the extent to which it is able to provide support for organizational development.

Lessons learned

220. The purpose of the lessons learned exercise has been to identify the factors and circumstances that promote sustainable reintegration outcomes. In general, the three cases together affirm the basic premise that the ability of returnees to successfully reintegrate back into their respective societies depends on the scope, scale, and nature of the integrative linkages that enable them to connect with family, community, government, social service providers, and employers. In all three countries, returnees have depended on access to commercial, financial, and labour markets to establish and maintain viable livelihoods.

221. To do this, returnees routinely augment the assistance they receive from UNHCR and its partners (e.g. government agencies and NGOs) with help from family members and/or community in order to establish sustainable livelihoods. The comparative analysis of these three cases highlights several key factors and circumstances that condition the various ways that economic, social, and administrative linkages can interact to promote sustainable reintegration outcomes. The crucial lessons for UNHCR in this regard is that the structural composition of any set of integrative networks varies according to the socio-cultural, economic, and political context in each country.

222. First, these three cases together focus attention on the role that the strategic environment plays in conditioning the constraints and opportunities available to UNHCR and returnees. On one hand, the relationship between the State and civil society influences the nature and substance of the partnership alliances that UNHCR employs for project implementation and protection monitoring. On the other hand, the relationship between the State and markets influences the economic options available to returnees themselves. These two factors suggest that UNHCR, the public sector, and the private sector constitute a triangular relationship that conditions the informal and formal options available to returnees as they develop their own reintegration strategies.

223. Second, these cases also focus attention on the critical role that capital accumulation plays in enabling returnees to establish sustainable livelihoods. These cases highlight the fact that the process of capital accumulation is often rooted in the circumstances of flight and camp residency, well before repatriation takes place. Nevertheless, UNHCR and its implementing partners play a crucial role in providing returnees with cash grants, in-kind goods, and services that can be invested in agricultural and handicraft production as well as small business start-ups. In rural based repatriations, access to and control over land is also one of the most important factors promoting sustainable reintegration outcomes. In urban-based repatriations, access to vocational training and credit for small business start-ups is equally important.

224. In this sense, these cases underscore the important role that repatriation assistance plays in capital accumulation. For example, in rural based repatriations, returnees require enough food assistance to cover at least one full agricultural cycle and in some cases two cycles. However, in Cambodia Repat 2, returnees received only 40 days of food assistance with options to earn more through food for work schemes. As a

result, some returnees may have been forced to divert capital assets and household labour away from agricultural investment to supplement food rations.

225. Third, these cases illustrate the important role that social linkages play in enabling returnees to augment services and inputs that UNHCR and its collaborating partners provide during repatriation and reintegration. Generally speaking, the most successful returnees were those who had access to alternative sources of capital assets with which to invest in agricultural production and small business start-ups. For example, those returnees who had more extensive domestic and overseas connections with family and clan members who provided cash remittances and outlets for handicraft sales tended to do better than those who lacked such connections. Social linkages are especially important in situations where (a) the government's capacity to provide services is weak and/or (b) gaps occur in the scope and scale of services provided by UNHCR and its collaborating partners.

226. Fourth, the cases highlight the crucial role that UNHCR and its partners play in supporting small-scale projects that provide returnees and their neighbours with collective goods and services, and that generate goodwill among neighbouring communities and government officials. The most important inputs are physical infrastructure such as roads and bridges that enhance people's productive capacity as well as access to markets and basic social services (e.g. education, health). The design and implementation of such projects, however, raises a number of issues associated with equitable access (e.g. irrigation projects in Laos) and, ultimately, sustainability.

227. Fifth, these cases highlight the important role that UNHCR plays in protection and monitoring to ensure the returnees have equal access to goods and services as well as citizenship rights. Protection monitoring is subject to a variety of factors that condition the relationships between returnees and their neighbours as well as the attitude of the receiving country governments. In this sense, the role of trust between UNHCR, governments, and returnees is crucial. These cases also suggest that UNHCR's effectiveness in this regard depends on its ability to recruit international staff who speak local languages, and international female staff who can provide protection services for women. These cases also suggest that the allocation of protection resources (e.g. staff time) is frequently subject to external pressures from various advocacy groups and governments.

228. I have structured this section as follows. In Section 2, I identify four components of the strategic environment that govern UNHCR's reintegration work. In Sections 3 and 4 I discuss how the circumstances of flight and camp residency, and the repatriation process itself promote or inhibit sustainable reintegration outcomes. Section 5 examines some of the more salient economic, social, and administrative linkages that affect reintegration outcomes in both rural and urban situations. The section also examines key aspects of UNHCR's protection monitoring work as well as support for small-scale projects and especially vulnerable individuals and groups (EVI/Gs), with particular focus on support for female returnees. In Section 6, I briefly discuss the role of local and international organizations in the context of (a) their capacity to collaborate with UNHCR, and (b) UNHCR's phase out and exit strategies. Section 7 concludes by summarizing some of the more salient observations and lessons learned that are identified throughout the chapter.

Strategic environment

229. In each of the three countries, repatriation and reintegration processes have taken place within a larger socio-economic and political context. At the macro level, the structural relationship between civil society and the State makes up the institutional framework of integrative linkages in which UNHCR operates in each country. Thus, the scope and scale of UNHCR's formal role is governed by legal agreements with the governments of the receiving countries. At the micro level, the socio-political and demographic characteristics of returnees influence the manner and degree to which individuals are able to establish and maintain such linkages. These two sets of factors interact with one another to condition the responsibilities and options available to UNHCR in implementing appropriate repatriation and reintegration strategies.

State and civil society

230. Civil society, the space between the family and the State, also refers to the ability of individuals and groups to undertake various social, economic, and political activities independently of, and in concert with, the government. The concept of civil society also implies that the rights of individuals and groups relative to the State are governed by a rule of law. However, the scope and nature of the space accorded to civil society varies substantially from country to country. Also, the state and civil society (e.g. non-governmental organizations) enjoy certain comparative advantages over one another. For example, NGOs are often better able to target specific groups of people with specialized services, while governments can mobilize a broader spectrum of resources over wider geographical areas. Sustainable integrative networks ultimately require active collaboration between the public and private sectors.

231. First, the economic reforms initiated in all three countries in the late to mid 1980s created more favourable macro-economic conditions, enabling many returnees to establish and maintain integrative linkages with commercial, financial, and labour markets. In Laos, the New Economic Mechanism (NEM) initiated in 1986 signaled a reduction in the State's involvement in agricultural production and allowed rural producers, including returnees, to engage in more open market exchange. In Viet Nam, economic reform policies known as *doi moi* have led to a more dynamic economy that increasingly relies on the private sector to create employment opportunities in both urban and rural areas. In Cambodia, economic reforms have unleashed a frenzy of entrepreneurial activity that is rapidly creating a more structurally diverse economy. In all three countries, the State and international donors have also focused on developing transportation and communication infrastructure to improve people's access to local, national, and international markets.

232. Second, the space accorded to social and political activity independent of the government has varied substantially from country to country. In Laos, this space is quite narrow. Local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are not permitted and international organizations and NGOs operate under close scrutiny. Open discussion of political and human rights is discouraged. In Cambodia, this space has been widening in rather dramatic fashion over the past decade. There is a plethora of local (NGOs) as well as international organizations and NGOs specializing in a wide array of development services. There is also a relatively open press, a remarkable degree of religious tolerance, and open discussion about human and political rights. The situation in Viet Nam lies somewhere between Laos and Cambodia. While local NGOs are not permitted, international organizations and NGOs have been accorded more latitude to operate.

Discussions concerning economic and political reform, including more participatory forms of development planning, routinely take place within the government and party organizations. Moreover, discussion of political and human rights is increasingly visible, albeit under the control of government and party media.

233. Third, the development of a rule of law also varies from country to country. This is most evident in Cambodia where those with socio-political and economic power often act with impunity and disregard for established laws. In Laos, where a constitution was only recently ratified, the institutions and concepts supporting a rule of law are extremely weak. In Viet Nam, however, there are voluminous legal codes governing civil and criminal procedures. From the point of view UNHCR's protection work, such codes provide a common point of reference and formal appeal. In Cambodia and Laos, where matters of legal jurisprudence are less developed, there are fewer procedural avenues for formal review and appeal. In Cambodia, however, local human rights groups actively advocate with the government in support of political and human rights. In Cambodia Repat 2, UNHCR worked closely with one such organization concerning land rights issues and human rights training.

234. Finally, the institutions governing public administration and finance in each country also have varied in terms of their capacity to deliver services to individuals. Laos and Cambodia are both characterized by a weak public sector, particularly in rural areas at the local level where many basic services are often unavailable. In contrast, the government in Viet Nam is relatively stronger in terms of its capacity to deliver a wide range of services to people at the local level in many parts of the country. In all three countries, however, the State is faced with a debilitating lack of financial resources, which has increased their reliance on foreign assistance. Moreover, in all three countries endemic corruption and graft are encouraged by a lack of official transparency that undermines public accountability.

235. UNHCR's work in each of the three countries has taken place in the context of profound social, economic, and political changes over the past ten years that have affected the institutional composition of each country. Laos is characterized by a weak State, weak civil society, and weak private sector. Cambodia is characterized by a weak State, the recent emergence of a more vibrant - yet nascent - civil society, and the emergence of a more structurally diverse private economy. Viet Nam is characterized by a strong State, an increasingly dynamic economy, and an emerging civil society. As a result, the strength and vitality of the institutional framework varies from country to country.

Lesson 1 - The relationship between civil society and the State governs strategic options open to UNHCR in its repatriation and reintegration work.

Socio-political and demographic characteristics

236. The socio-political and demographic characteristics of returnees also play an important role at the micro-level in influencing repatriation and reintegration strategies. In Laos, returnees are primarily differentiated according to ethnicity and geographic origin. In Cambodia, returnee groups are often defined by their political affiliation, social class, and to a lesser extent, by ethnicity (e.g. ethnic minorities from the Northeast). In Viet Nam, returnees are defined by their capacity for employment, geographic region of origin, and sometimes by ethnicity (e.g. Hung, Chinese). In all cases, returnees tended to have less education and fewer skills. As a result, they also tended to be of lower socio-

economic status: in rural areas they tended to be farmers or petty traders while in the urban areas they tended to be wage labourers. The allocation of labour in the work place and household is often divided according to gender, and women faced greater disadvantages in securing equal access to services and employment because of lower education (e.g. literacy) and other structural impediments in each of the three countries. These affected the capacity of returnees to manage information and access available services.

237. Age also played an important role in determining the scope, scale, and nature of people's repatriation and reintegration strategies. In this sense, it is interesting to note that many young returnees were born in countries of first asylum (e.g. Cambodia Repat 1 and Laos). In Viet Nam, many children left their homes without their parents or other closely related adults and were subsequently classified as "unaccompanied minors." All these children had their own individual paths of reintegration, probably quite different from those of their parents and older neighbours. Age is also an important factor because the elderly may require special medical attention and other supportive services. In this respect, the strength of social linkages is critical to facilitating reintegration of the elderly, particularly in rural environments where such services are rarely – if ever – available from either the government or non-governmental organizations.

Lesson 2 - Socio-political and demographic characteristics like ethnicity, class, gender and age strongly influence the capacity of returnees to establish the economic, social, and administrative linkages that promote sustainable reintegration. More specialized studies are required that focus on repatriation and reintegration from the perspective of women, children, and the elderly.

Flight and camp residency

238. The circumstances of flight and camp residency conditioned the repatriation process and established a foundation for either weak or strong reintegration outcomes. Many people fled their countries with few possessions and little or no savings. For example, many Vietnamese sold their property and/or used savings to finance their boat departures. In other cases, such as Cambodia Repat 2, people were able to take at least some possessions with them. One factor influencing what people were able to take with them was the nature and route of flight. People fleeing Viet Nam and Laos had to cross large bodies of water which precluded them from taking many possessions, while at least some Cambodians in Repat 2 were able to transport possessions over land. Overall, many people had to sell personal belongings and/or use their remaining savings to purchase supplemental food rations or other services while in the camps.

239. The most important factors linking flight and camp residency with reintegration outcomes were (1) violence and personal trauma; (2) training and education; (3) employment and/or trade; (4) group formation and/or maintenance; and (5) contact with social services. The degree to which these factors influenced reintegration outcomes often depended on the tenure and circumstances of camp residency. In Cambodia Repat 1 and Laos, refugees lived in the camps for as many as 10 to 15 years. In the case of Viet Nam, people often remained in the camps for as many as five to seven years. In Cambodia Repat 2, people spent much less time in the various camps (maximum one and a half years). The policies and practices of first asylum countries regarding the nature and extent of social and economic activities available in camps also varied. For example, Thailand allowed a number of international and local organizations to provide services and employment for Laotian and Cambodian (e.g. Repat 1) camp residents, while sharply

restricting such activities for Vietnamese asylum seekers. Generally, the predominant sentiment among first asylum countries seemed to be that permissive camp environments encouraged refugee flows, while more restrictive policies would discourage such movements.

Violence and personal loss

240. In all cases, at least some people experienced personal violence and/or some other trauma during flight. Some people also experienced and/or witnessed violence and trauma during camp residency. Such stories (e.g. Vietnamese boat people; Cambodian Killing Fields; Lao crossing the Mekong River) are now part of the tragic lexicon of international migration. Such experiences have left both physical and emotional scars on the individuals concerned and their families. It is impossible to assess the human costs of such suffering, but it is certainly safe to say that such experiences may account for a great deal of the emotional stress and dysfunction that some individuals experience upon return.

Training and education

241. In the case of Laos, some returnees learned useful skills in agriculture or trade that they were able to use upon return. Some children, and to a lesser extent adult women, were able to study in Lao or Thai language. In Cambodia Repat 1, many people learned different vocational skills from various training programs and children were able to attend Khmer language schools. In Repat 2, people did not have such opportunities, partly due to their relatively brief camp tenure. In both Cambodian operations, people in Khmer Rouge camps had fewer such opportunities than people in other camps. In Viet Nam, such opportunities varied according to the country of first asylum. By and large, people had few, if any, opportunities for formal training of any sort, and the education some children received was primarily informal (e.g. Hong Kong).

Employment and savings

242. In the case of Laos, some returnees were able to work either inside or outside the camps. Others were able to engage in commercial trade (e.g. handicraft sales) and/or receive remittances from relatives living abroad. However, in the Viet Nam case, many returnees had few, if any, opportunities for employment or trade, and as a result, often used up meager savings while in the camps. In Cambodia the case is more mixed according to the period, camp location, and political affiliation. In Repat 1, 22,000 camp residents were employed by UNBRO and many others had opportunities to work for NGO and international organizations. Others, meanwhile, provided services and engaged in trade with local Thai traders as well as other camp residents. Those who were employed by service organizations learned valuable technical and organizational skills that they could use upon their return. For example, many NGO employees found employment with NGOs or other organizations in Phnom Penh after their return in 1992. In Repat 2, when people spent much less time in the camps, people in Khmer Rouge camps had fewer opportunities for employment and/or trade than did those who resided in the FUNCINPEC camp.

Socio-political organization

243. The opportunities for group formation and maintenance in the camps played a significant role in the repatriation and reintegration operations. In Laos, people originally fled as individuals or in small groups (families and clans). Many people then formed groups in camps according to family, clan, and ethnic relationships - usually under the auspices of a charismatic or familial leader. These groups, particularly in the case of upland ethnic minority groups, often constituted the basic unit of repatriation in terms of the large and small settlements. In Viet Nam, people left as individuals (albeit in small groups aboard boats), resided in camps and detention centers in small group settings, and then returned as individual cases to their original homes.

244. The picture in this regard is again more complex with respect to Cambodia due to the highly politicized circumstances of flight and camp residency. In Repat 1, people either fled as individuals or families to various camps, or in groups controlled by the Khmer Rouge. People resided in camps controlled by various political factions, but then returned as individuals - except for certain KR groups. In Repat 2, people either fled in groups controlled by different Khmer Rouge factions, or as individuals or in smaller groups more loosely affiliated with FUNCIPPEC. People then returned either as individuals (e.g. Samraong), small groups (e.g. Samlot; ethnic groups from Anlong Veng); or larger groups (e.g. various former KR factions in Samlot, Anlong Veng, Trapaeng Prasath).

Social services

245. Residents in all camps had access to certain services, such as health care. For many people, particularly those of rural background, the time in the camp represented their first such exposure to Western medicine and other social services. In this respect, some people learned how to manage their way through bureaucratic environments in order to access certain services. However, not all people took advantage of such services while in camp, nor did such experiences mean that people were able to easily access such services when they repatriated. It is also important to note that in terms the notion of "dependency" finds its early articulation in regard to people's perceived reliance on such services.

Lesson 3 - Time spent in countries of first asylum provide an important opportunity for camp residents to acquire new skills and accumulate savings that enable them to establish sustainable livelihoods following repatriation. UNHCR can promote sustainable reintegration outcomes by (a) guaranteeing safe and secure camp environments with adequate food rations and basic social services, and (b) providing adult literacy, vocational training and commercial and employment opportunities for camp residents whenever feasible. These two factors depend on UNHCR's ability to advocate to countries of first asylum that they adopt camp policies allowing such opportunities.

Repatriation

246. Repatriation is both a logistical and a social process. It is logistical in the mechanics of managing transportation and processing returnees through transit centers. It is social in the sense that the mode of repatriation affects the way returnees eventually establish integrative linkages with family, community, and government. The mode of

repatriation also affects reintegration outcomes by creating conditions for (a) protection monitoring and (b) assistance delivery. The repatriation process is in turn subject to a number of interrelated factors, including (a) the quality of information, (b) socio-political organization, and (c) repatriation options for returnees.

Information

247. People in all camps received information and advice from a variety of sources that was often conflicting, and thus confusing. The degree to which people believed such information depended on how far they trusted the source, and their own plans and motivations. In both the Laos and Vietnamese camps, one major factor that influenced people's decisions about voluntary repatriation was the possibility of resettlement in a third country. UNHCR made concerted efforts to provide accurate information about repatriate procedures and reintegration practices. Such efforts included facilitating visits by UNHCR staff, government officials, and even returnees themselves to potential repatriation sites (e.g. Cambodia and Laos). Another factor that influenced people's trust in the reliability of information concerned the role that local leaders played in the process, which in turn was a function of socio-political organization of the refugees groups in the camps. However, in some cases, leaders used information for their own personal or political interests.

Socio-political organization

248. In Laos, many people formed groupings based on kinship and ethnicity under various clan leaders. These groups constituted the basic social unit through which many upland people were repatriated. Others, primarily lowland Lao groups, returned as individual cases to their original communities. In Cambodia Repat 1 and Repat 2, social and administrative cohesion in the camps was maintained by different political factions. For example, in the case of various former Khmer Rouge factions in Repat 2, social cohesion was maintained by both vertical and horizontal relationships based on political and military affiliation. However, in the case of the FUNCIPPEC groups in Samraong, the socio-political organization was much less cohesive because of the varied occupations (e.g. farmers, petty traders) and the scattered nature of residency. In Viet Nam, people fled as individuals or in small family groups, lived in camps as individual cases, and were then repatriated as individual cases to their original communities, and usually resided with their families.

Lesson 4 - The process of group repatriation is strengthened by the degree of social and organizational cohesion that existed prior to movement and/or was formed while in the camps. Such cohesion depends on various factors, including (1) family, clan, and ethnic relationships; (2) socio-political organization, and (3) group leadership.

Repatriation options

249. The options available to people are subject to a variety of geo-physical and political factors. For example, in Cambodia Repat 1, land in the areas that many people initially chose was heavily land-mined, already occupied, or located in areas where there was ongoing fighting. This effectively foreclosed the planned option A (i.e. 2 ha. of land) with the subsequent result that people chose option C, cash assistance i.e. USD50/adult, USD25/child). In Laos, large group settlements were located in lowland areas due to the government's security concerns and environmental policies to reduce slash and burn

agriculture, the farming system used by many upland groups. In Viet Nam, the necessity of having family books required people to return to their original communities where such documentation was possible.

250. Repatriation strategy and procedures play an important role in determining the degree to which UNHCR is able to effectively carry out its protection and monitoring role after people return. In Laos, returnees were processed through reception centers before going on to their designated repatriation destinations. Those who went to large group settlements or small group settlements did so under relatively controlled conditions. Both large and small groups received the bulk of their repatriation and reintegration assistance once they arrived at the designated group site. In Cambodia, people in Repat 1 - and in some cases in Repat 2 - were repatriated through reception centers where they received their cash and other assistance. People were either provided transportation to certain areas (e.g. Repat 1 and Repat 2) or given cash to arrange their own transportation (e.g. Repat 2). The exception to this was the case of Phu Noi where people spontaneously repatriated under the direction of a particular KR faction. In Viet Nam, people were generally repatriated as individual cases back to their original points of departure. Once home, they received cash assistance and support services.

Type and amount of repatriation assistance

251. The mode and circumstances of repatriation also influence the type of repatriation assistance provided to returnees. In the rural circumstances of Cambodia and Laos, people were either provided with transportation or given cash grants to arrange their own. In circumstances where people's livelihoods depend on agricultural production, returnees also require sufficient food assistance to carry them through at least one full agricultural cycle. In Laos, UNHCR helped promote sustainable reintegration outcomes by providing returnees with 18-24 months worth of rice rations and/or cash grants with which to purchase food. In Cambodia, the WFP provided Repat 1 returnees with 400 days of rice rations, but provided Repat 2 returnees with only 4 months of rice rations with supplemental rice available on a food for work basis. Such modest initial amounts of food rations undermine reintegration outcomes when returnees must divert savings and/or household labour away from agricultural investment in order to obtain supplemental food rations.

Lesson 5 - In rural areas, returnees require sufficient food rations to carry them through at least one full agricultural cycle. In some situations (e.g. poor initial harvests), returnees may require additional food rations. Cash grants for food procurement may also be cost-efficient mechanisms for promoting food security under certain circumstances.

Lesson 6 - Sustainable individual and family resettlement is more likely when people return to known destinations where social and administrative linkages are strongest (e.g. family, community). The two best examples of this are (a) Viet Nam where people had to return to fixed locations to receive documentation and assistance, and (b) Laos where people returned to large and small group settlements. Conversely, many people in Cambodia Repat 1 and Repat 2 opted to return as single cases. People were supposed to register with village chiefs, but in some cases they either did not, or went on to other places. Such people all but disappeared for monitoring purposes.

Lesson 7 - The degree to which repatriation strategies and procedures contribute to sustainable reintegration outcomes depends, in part, on the type of repatriation assistance provided and the point at which people receive such assistance. For example, returnees

who receive land and/or other assistance at their designated destination tend to be more firmly rooted in a particular area. Conversely, people's potential mobility is enhanced when the primary form of assistance is a cash grant provided at reception centers. Sustainable reintegration outcomes do not necessarily require long-term residency in a particular community. Some returnees may take advantage of the potential flexibility that cash grants create to search for employment and/or stable social connections that will eventually lead to a sustainable livelihood.

Lesson 8 - Repatriation strategies employed depend on the institutional strength of the government and political realities, as well as actual choices available to people. For example, in Viet Nam, it was possible to organize cash payments and other assistance through MOLISA due to its relatively strong organizational capacity. This contrasts with Laos and Cambodia where the government's organizational capacity was weaker.

Reintegration

252. In all three countries, reintegration outcomes are influenced by (a) the strength and vitality of the economic and social linkages that promote sustainable livelihoods, (b) the degree to which returnees are able to access services that promote such linkages, and (c) UNHCR's capacity for carrying out effective protection monitoring. It is always important to bear in mind that all three factors are inextricably linked with and dependent on one another.

253. In Laos and Cambodia, returnees are primarily engaged in small-scale subsistence and commercial agriculture in which the State's capacity to provide rural development services is relatively weak. In such areas, integration outcomes, therefore, depend on the ability of returnees to independently produce and market agricultural products and handicrafts. Such production is in turn dependent on the allocation of household labour as well as the availability of land and capital for investment. In Viet Nam, many returnees have been repatriated to urban areas where the State's capacity to provide a variety of services is relatively much stronger. In such areas, integration outcomes depend largely on the ability of returnees to find gainful employment, in either private firms, public sector enterprises, or through self-employment in small business enterprises (SBE). Such employment is in turn dependent on local and regional labour and financial markets (i.e. access to credit for small business start-ups).

Investment

254. In Laos, many people – as noted – were able to work, receive cash allowances, and market handicrafts while living in the camps in Thailand. People also received sufficient amounts of rice assistance for 1.5 – 2 years and home construction upon return and many have continued to receive remittances and market handicrafts. These factors provided some families with sufficient capital for investment in agricultural production. In other cases, such resources may have been used for other needs such as emergency health care. In Cambodia Repat 2, people had fewer employment opportunities and received substantially less assistance upon repatriation. They also had fewer alternative sources of capital and received less cash assistance upon return. As a result, they had fewer capital resources available for investment in agricultural production, which increased their reliance on services and inputs from outside sources. In Vietnam, people also had fewer resources available upon their return as well as alternative sources of income such as overseas remittances and received relatively less in terms of cash

assistance. As a result, returnees were more reliant on family assistance and services provided by UNHCR, the State, and collaborating organizations (e.g. vocational training and credit).

Lesson 9 - The amount of capital that people have to initially invest in productive activities following repatriation depends on employment opportunities in the camps, repatriation assistance, and alternative sources of capital. Those who lack employment opportunities in the camps, have few alternative resources, and/or receive less repatriation assistance, often must rely more on outside assistance from UNHCR, the State, collaborating agencies, and social networks.

Lesson 10 - In situations where the government capacity is weak, the most effective forms of initial assistance are those that by-pass local governance institutions and place resources directly in the hands of returnees. In cases where the government's capacity is stronger, local governance institutions can play a more constructive role in providing initial assistance.

Land

255. In areas where agriculture is the primary mode of economic production, access to and control over land is one of the most important factors promoting sustainable reintegration outcomes. The question of land, therefore, requires special attention in the design of reintegration plans. In this sense, the Cambodian Repat 1 is instructive. Many returnees were not able to return to preferred areas because land was either unsafe (e.g. landmines and/or ongoing armed conflict) or already occupied. Seven years later, landless returnees constitute a noticeable proportion of people, including women and children, who migrate internally and across international borders in search of land and employment.

256. In the large group settlements in Laos and Cambodian Repats 1 and 2, land rights issues have presented UNHCR with some of its most vexing protection and reintegration problems. In Laos, the problems pertaining to land rights have concerned (1) conflicting claims with local villages who claim prior use rights, and (2) the allocation of available land within returnee communities. In Cambodia Repat 2, where people were repatriated to areas where they originally had land, the main problems have concerned (a) the expropriation of land by other groups (e.g. Anlong Veng) and land-grabbing by people with more power (e.g. military personnel in Samraong) and (b) the allocation of remaining land that was often extensively land-mined.

257. In all such cases, official third party enforcement of land rights has been weak. Institutional mechanisms such as formal land titles represent novel innovations for governments that have asserted State ownership of all land. Traditionally, use rights have been informally governed according to social norms and conventions at the local level in both countries. Only when disputes over use rights could not be resolved through direct negotiations were such conflicts referred to higher authorities for consideration. Such institutional mechanisms may often work well when there is sufficient land of comparable quality relative to population. However, the institutional capacity to govern use rights has not kept pace with the growing number and complexity of conflicts that have resulted from population growth and the increasing value of productive land.

258. UNHCR has tended to intervene in land rights disputes on a case-by-case basis as a protection issue. The primary modes of intervention have been to help negotiate disputes, refer disputes to appropriate authorities for action, or create more land through additional inputs (e.g. Ban Pha Thao in Laos). In Cambodia, UNHCR has also been able to refer such cases to local human rights groups. UNHCR has also tried to promote more formal and systematic processes by encouraging government authorities to grant land titles in a more timely fashion. However, such efforts are undermined by the weak institutional capacity of the government in both countries.

Lesson 11 - The resolution of land disputes is time-consuming and potentially costly. Many such disputes can be minimized (but not entirely avoided) by surveying and assessing the quality of land available prior to repatriation. The degree to which such planning is possible, however, often depends on (a) time and financial resources, (b) circumstances of flight and repatriation, (c) the socio-political context conditioning relationships between returnees and their neighbours.

Lesson 12 - The resolution of land rights issues ultimately must involve a more systemic, comprehensive, and long-term approach. UNHCR can undertake pro-active short-term interventions that strategically compliment and support the efforts of other organizations to strengthen the governance of land rights.

Agricultural inputs

259. As noted above, sustainable agricultural production is strengthened to the degree that people have direct access to and control over the means of production and marketing, including land, capital resources (including animals or hand-tillers for land preparation), tools and seeds, and knowledge. The key factors in this sense are (a) inputs and financial resources that reach people directly (e.g. overseas remittances) and (b) integrative linkages that connect returnees with rural development services.

260. In both Cambodia and Laos, UNHCR provided tools and seeds for vegetables, rice, and other cash crops. In Laos, UNHCR assisted in certain cases with mechanical clearing and collaborated with certain donors to provide irrigation systems for certain communities, and provided individuals with cash to purchase livestock (small animals) or financed partners to create animal banks (Laos). In both Cambodia and Laos, UNHCR financed extension services in animal husbandry and veterinary care. UNHCR provided rural infrastructure in the form of roads and bridges that have played an important role in marketing and access for repatriation and reintegration assistance inputs. In Viet Nam, UNHCR financed several small-scale irrigation schemes through its micro-projects implemented by MOLISA.

Lesson 13 - In areas characterized by weak and ineffective communal and administrative governance, primary attention must be devoted to placing productive resources directly into the hands of returnees. Such inputs may be strategically linked with strengthening local institutional capacity to promote sustainability. For example, irrigation schemes require communal governance mechanism (e.g. WUGs). However, such mechanisms may represent a complex organizational innovation for communities without prior experience in larger scale water management.

Vocational training and financial credit

261. Vocational training and financial credit has played a significant role in promoting sustainable reintegration in Viet Nam, particularly in the urban areas where most returnees are concentrated. UNHCR and its partners made substantial contributions to Vocational Training Centers managed by the government. Generally, the effectiveness of the VTCs depended on their ability to plan course offerings, recruit appropriate instructors, and link trainees with relevant jobs in a rapidly changing job market. Other organizations meanwhile provided significant levels of financial credit to help returnees start up small business activities. The larger credit schemes were implemented through the State-managed banking system. Perhaps the strongest set of economic linkages is provided by those services that connected vocational training with job counseling and/or access to credit. For example, many (if not all) of the VTCs provided courses in small business management. Such training helped some returnees plan how to use bank loans more effectively.

262. In the absence of any similar such institutional capacity in rural Laos, UNHCR initiated a special fund to support a small vocational training programme that was designed to link especially vulnerable individuals (EVIs) and others to private businesses that agreed to provide on-the-job training. This initiative was originally managed by UNHCR's implementing partner in the government. However, many returnees were initially discouraged from applying to participate in the programme due to informal fees demanded by officials for processing the applications. UNHCR eventually decided to implement the project funds itself. This example from Laos illustrates the difficulties of implementing such programs through government institutions that lack sufficient technical and human capacity for managing such projects. It also illustrates the limited vocational opportunities available to people in the private sector outside the larger urban centers.

Lesson 14 - Vocational training and financial credit arrangements can play an especially important role in promoting sustainable reintegration outcomes in urban areas. The most important factors for success are (1) a vibrant economy with a diversified demand for labour and small businesses activities, and (2) strong institutions that can sustainably manage such programs. The experience in Viet Nam and Laos also suggest that private sector enterprises represent another set of potential partners for UNHCR. This would require a re-orientation on the part of UNHCR to incorporate private sector firms into its orbit of potential partners, particularly with respect to reintegration.

Protection monitoring

263. Sustainable reintegration outcomes are also dependent on UNHCR's capacity to provide effective protection monitoring for returnees. This includes ensuring that returnees are not subject to discrimination when accessing services and/or exercising citizenship rights on the basis of their returnee status or political affiliations. Such work depends, of course, on the nature of the particular protection issues that vary from country to country, which have included, inter alia: (a) safety (all countries), (b) conflicts over land (e.g. Cambodia Repat 1 and Repat 2; Laos); (c) arrest cases (all countries, particularly Viet Nam), and (d) equal enjoyment of citizenship rights and access to certain services (all countries). UNHCR's ability to carry out effective protection work depends on, inter alia, policy guidelines, staffing patterns and resource allocation. These factors, in turn, are often subject to the influence of various interested parties, such as donors and NGO advocacy groups.

Resource allocation

264. Protection monitoring is a scarce service in that staffing and finances are rarely, if ever sufficient to identify and meet all the needs and requirements of returnees. As a result, the prioritization of staff time and finances represents trade-offs that try to strike a reasonable balance between UNHCR policies and the practical limitations associated with implementation. One way to approach this analytically is to consider that certain returnee groups have political constituencies in various countries that provide significant funding for UNHCR activities. Two examples concern the Hmong in Laos and various groups in Viet Nam that have organized constituencies that advocate on their behalf with the US government. The result in these two cases was that in Laos some Hmong communities benefited from certain inputs (e.g. irrigation systems) while other groups have not. In Viet Nam, a great deal of attention was devoted to monitoring certain cases which, in an environment of scarce resources, suggests that more routine cases, may have received less attention. I do not suggest that these groups should not receive such attention. Rather, I raise the question concerning what steps UNHCR can take to ensure that other groups and/or individuals receive a similar level of inputs or monitoring visits.

Lesson 15 - Protection services requiring staff time and financial resources must be prioritized to strike a reasonable balance between UNHCR's general protection mandate and specific interests of donors and advocacy groups. UNHCR should consider how to narrow any gaps between policy intents and outcomes arising from such trade-offs.

Staffing

265. In all three countries, while UNHCR employed international staff who spoke local languages, it did so with varying degrees of consistency. For example, fluent Vietnamese speakers were employed throughout the entire CPA period in Viet Nam, while in Laos a similar degree of consistency was only achieved since 1995. The importance that this plays in promoting good relationships with local authorities and securing access to case monitoring cannot be over-emphasized. For example, in Viet Nam, where there is a particular emphasis on following established procedures, government officials on more than several occasions underscored the importance of having expatriate staff who spoke Vietnamese. UNHCR has also employed local staff in all three countries to monitor project work and compliment protection efforts. The ability to recruit competent staff is subject to factors related to human resource development and socio-cultural mores that tend to preclude certain types of employment (see gender section below). It is interesting to note, that in Cambodia, Repat 2, many of the administrative and field staff were Repat 1 returnees.

266. All staff work under extremely stressful conditions. Two points in this regard are especially relevant. First, both international and female staff are particularly challenged by a number of socio-cultural factors that can undermine their authority and effectiveness. Second, national staff are also vulnerable to a variety of pressures that occur when their roles as citizens and UNHCR employees conflict. For example, national staff in Laos reported that they are sometimes subject to pressure from government officials to look the other way when inputs are distributed, or ensure certain benefits or favours are made available to them. In all cases, local staff may be privy to certain information that they are reluctant to share with international staff for fear of reprisal from the government.

Lesson 16 - UNHCR's ability to provide effective and efficient protection monitoring depends on its ability to recruit and train international staff who are both fluent in the language spoken by most returnees and knowledgeable about local culture and customs.

Lesson 17 - Local UNHCR staff often work under unique pressures associated with their dual role as UNHCR employees and host country citizens, especially in politically sensitive situations. UNHCR can support local staff by institutionalizing mechanisms that provide them with an opportunity to voice concerns about such issues.

Lesson 18 - UNHCR's work can be strengthened in both the short and longer term with more extensive training for its local staff in areas concerning (a) human rights and protection monitoring, and (b) project planning and implementation. In the short term, such training will enable local staff to make more substantive contributions in protection and project work. In the longer run, UNHCR can indirectly help strengthen institutional capacity by training personnel who will eventually work in other capacities.

Services for Extremely Vulnerable Individuals and Groups (EVI/Gs)

267. The general definition of EVIs concerns people who face special disadvantages or have special needs. This includes, inter alia, the physically and mentally ill, victims of violence, female heads of households, and unaccompanied minors. The definition of an EVI/G and the nature of their needs, however, often vary from country to country, and influences the way in which services are provided. For example, in Cambodia, where land mines are an ever-present danger, UNHCR referred amputees to collaborating agencies for services and financed extensive mine-clearance activities as a preventative measure. In Viet Nam, UNHCR contracted NARV to provide services and make referrals for unaccompanied minors.

268. The effective provision of EVI/G services is a question of how to most efficiently target scarce supplies of appropriate services. First and foremost is the question of identifying EVI/G cases. The initial work in this regard is usually done in the camps or detention centers. Such cases are then flagged to UNHCR staff in the receiving country, where they should receive monitoring visits from field staff and/or collaborating agencies to assess their needs and provide appropriate services or referrals. One good example of how this process can work concerns UNHCR's work with UNAMs in Viet Nam. Such cases were (a) fairly easy to identify (based on age and primary care provider), (b) repatriated under controlled circumstances, and (c) specific agencies for referral. This example highlights the need for UNHCR staff in the camps and the home country to work with a shared understanding of what constitutes an EVI case requiring follow-up services after repatriation.

269. On the other hand, UNHCR in Cambodia Repat 2 was faced with extreme difficulties in identifying EVI cases in Anlong Veng where people had spontaneously returned. In this particular situation, UNHCR had previously contracted a local NGO to identify EVI cases and then either provide services or make appropriate referrals in other reintegration areas. Unfortunately, by the time this local NGO was able to extend its work to Anlong Veng, people were scattered over a large area. Moreover, the NGO in question lacked the requisite staffing and procedures to make systematic assessments and, as a result, many cases probably were not identified. In Laos, UNHCR established special provisions to make vocational training services available to certain people, including EVI cases. MLSW, however, processed the applications in a cumbersome manner and required unofficial fees, which prohibited many returnees from accessing

such opportunities. In both cases UNHCR was obliged to assume greater responsibility for managing such services because the institutional mechanisms were weak and ineffective.

270. Such gaps are further exacerbated by several additional factors. First, a lack of information about the location of such cases inhibits agency follow up. Second, EVI/Gs may not have information about such services. Moreover, they may not understand the need for or how to access such services because of a lack of education and experience with such systems (relevant camp experiences notwithstanding), or other types of cultural inhibitions. Third, the location of services relative to the returnee population may inhibit access, particularly in rural areas. Fourth, there may be no providers at all, or government agencies and/or collaborating organizations may not provide the right type of service. Finally, and somewhat ironically, the sheer number of agencies providing services can create institutional and geographical gaps in coverage when there is insufficient coordination among service providers.

271. The relevant question, then, is how can UNHCR help narrow the gaps through which EVI cases may fall. In Laos, access to relevant services was improved when group settlement sites were located near larger population centers where services such as medical might be available. In Cambodia Repat 2, UNHCR financed the delivery of services medical services through health outposts in or near returnee communities. Some agencies (e.g. ICRC) helped provided amputees with access to relevant services by paying for their transportation. In Viet Nam, UNHCR helped by financing dispensaries in certain areas and as well as organizations that carried EVIs in their caseload (e.g. the Vietnam Women's Union in Hai Phong).

Lessons 19 - UNHCR's ability to effectively address the needs of EVI cases depends on: (1) the definition of EVIs; (2) early identification in the camps and clear communication with the receiving country; and (3) follow-up and assessment procedures in reception centers. In the countries of repatriation, the effective delivery of EVI services also depends on the availability of appropriate resources for referral and clear communication with contracted partners and collaborating agencies. Such processes are strengthened to the degree that there is (a) sufficient time for screening and monitoring, (b) sufficient financial resources, (c) common understanding and approach among UNHCR staff, and, (d) institutional will on the part of UNHCR, collaborating agencies, and host country governments to identify and actively follow-up on such cases.

Gender

272. One way to approach the subject of gender as it concerns services targeted for adult women (and girls) is to consider the practical and strategic needs of women. Practical needs include a woman's access to basic human services. Strategic needs refer to socio-economic and political empowerment and a woman's ability to control the means of production and exercise an active voice in household and public affairs. UNHCR's approach to gender in all three countries has been to focus on the practical needs of women and girls in cases in which they are considered extremely vulnerable individuals (EVIs).

273. Targeting certain women for special support and assistance, such as female heads of households, is certainly one way to ensure that some women receive help with practical needs. However, in cases where women are less educated, enjoy less social mobility, and have fewer resources, the delivery methods and location of social services

may act as structural impediments for equal access to social services. Certain practices may also subvert, albeit unintentionally, a women's role in the household or community, or at least affirm social situations in which they have a less than equal voice. For example, repatriation and reintegration assistance provided through male heads of household may dissipate women's influence over the allocation of such assistance (e.g. food, cash).

274. The relatively short-term nature of UNHCR assistance generally precludes longer-term efforts to directly address the strategic needs of women. However, in some cases, it may be possible for UNHCR to strategically contribute to the longer-term empowerment of women by promoting their participation in planning and implementing certain activities that UNHCR-financed partners carry out. One such example concerns Consortium's activities in Laos that tried to use the nascent village Women's Union as a local implementing partner for animal banks (e.g. Ban Pha Thao). In Viet Nam, UNHCR and various agencies worked through the Viet Nam Women's Union to provide credit assistance and vocational training for women returnees. Though these examples involved varied outcomes, they share a common approach of addressing the practical needs of women while promoting institutions that provided them with a more active voice in matters affecting household and community.

275. In terms of protection, the manner in which UNHCR is staffed, and the degree to which appropriate training is provided, plays an extremely important role in ensuring women's access to appropriate services. The case of violence against women, either in terms of domestic violence or rape, highlights the important role that gender-sensitive staffing can play. For example, it is unrealistic to assume women would discuss domestic battering and sexual violence with male staff, either national or international. In this regard, it is a step in the right direction for UNHCR to employ international women who speak the local language. It is an even greater step to employ and train local women for this type of work. More efforts must also be made to provide all staff with gender-sensitive training.

Lesson 20 - UNHCR's capacity to plan and implement more gender-sensitive programming would be improved by instituting a comprehensive gender action plan for each repatriation and reintegration operation. The first step would be a situational analysis specifically targeted at women. The primary focus of such an analysis would be on the circumstances of protection and reintegration that make female returnees substantively more vulnerable than male returnees. A second focus would be to identify ways that UNHCR and its partners could meet the practical needs of women while at the same time addressing their strategic needs. A second important step would concern deliberate efforts to recruit and train local female field staff. This requires a concerted effort and clear sense of institutional will on the part of UNHCR if the structural impediments to women's participation are to be effectively overcome. A third step would be to establish and maintain more proactive relationships with other organizations (e.g. NGOs and international organizations) that specialize in gender-related programming.

Quick Impacts Projects (small-scale projects and micro-projects)

276. In all three countries, UNHCR employed special projects as a major tool to provide returnees with essential basic services and promote goodwill with their neighbours. The type of project, and methodology used, has depended on local modes of production, local governance institutions, and the characteristics and perceived needs of

returnees and their communities. Three important questions regarding QIPs and micro-projects concern (1) the management and oversight of the projects, (2) efficiency in time and cost relative to the number of beneficiaries, and (3) the sustainability of project inputs.

277. In Laos, where many people were repatriated in large and small group settlements, UNHCR was faced with the complex task of creating entirely new communities where agriculture was the primary mode of production. As a result, basic services such as educational and health facilities, roads, provisions for housing and land distribution had to be provided from the outset by UNHCR. This task was complicated by local governance institutions being extremely weak and the existence of relatively few local partners to work with. In Cambodia Repat 2, people often repatriated to their places of origin where the infrastructure and housing had been destroyed. In this sense, UNHCR's task was similar to that in Laos where the physical infrastructure of the communities had to be reconstructed. Unlike Laos, however, UNHCR in Cambodia Repat 2 was able to contract a larger array of international and local organizations to implement small-scale projects. In Viet Nam, UNHCR's task was decidedly easier in that (a) returnees were repatriated as individual cases back to their original communities, and (b) the local and national government institutions were relatively much stronger in their capacity to implement small-scale projects.

Lessons 21 - Institutional circumstances in Viet Nam and Cambodia have been more conducive to implementing QIPs than in Laos. In Viet Nam, the government was able to play the lead implementation role. In Cambodia, more international and local organizations could implement projects. The case of Viet Nam suggests that it may be more cost-effective to work through the public sector if circumstances are right. The case of Cambodia Repat 2 suggests, however, that under different circumstances, it may be more cost-effective for UNHCR to directly coordinate the work of implementing partners.

Project type and technology

278. Drinking water systems are a good example of how a particular technology influences the efficiency and sustainability of certain projects. In Cambodia, the technology of choice was bore-wells, while in Laos one of the technologies used was gravity feed systems. Each technology entails different modes of construction, which in turn require varying degrees of institutional capacity to mobilize resources for maintenance and repairs. For example, the bore-wells involve a relatively simple technology that is relatively easy to implement and requires modest maintenance. Gravity feed systems, by comparison, are more complex to implement and require more extensive maintenance. In this sense, bore-wells can be managed by small decentralized groups of users with little technological knowledge, while gravity feed systems require more centralized governance structures and a greater technical expertise.

279. The type of technology employed may also affect the organizational sustainability of local partners, which is a key factor concerning phase-out strategies. For example, in Cambodia Repat 2, UNHCR funded two local organizations to implement borehole wells (DEEP and Tuk Saath). Both organizations were competent in their technical capacity to implement projects as long as they had funding to support their efforts. However, this type of construction requires substantial capital investment and overhead in transport and machinery, and over the long run it may not be possible for either organization to sustain operations without outside funding. Thus, governments

may sometimes have a comparative advantage in terms of their broader access to capital inputs such as transport and machinery.

280. UNHCR employed consultants at various stages of the process to advise and provide oversight. In Cambodia, UNHCR's work was greatly enhanced by the use of Australian Red R engineers who provided capable technical assistance in terms of planning, implementation, and monitoring of various reintegration projects. In Laos, UNHCR tended to contract with private firms to implement projects such as school construction. In Viet Nam, UNHCR primarily relied on technical capacity within the local, district, and provincial administration.

Lesson 22 - The most efficient projects to implement and potentially sustain involve physical plant and infrastructure that are relatively maintenance-free and/or where there is sufficient institutional capacity for required maintenance. The sustainability of such projects is enhanced to the degree that (a) competent technical oversight is available during planning and implementation, and (b) local authorities are able to mobilize financial and human resources to provide ongoing maintenance. Conversely, the least efficient projects are those that employ relatively complex technology that (a) require governance mechanisms that are new to a particular community, and/or (b) exceed the capacity of the local community or government administration to finance. Thus, organizational sustainability is even more important than technical sustainability.

Participatory planning

281. The question of sustainability raises the question of participatory planning practices. Current community development models assume that the direct participation of beneficiaries in project selection contribute to sustainability because such may help promote a sense of community or group ownership. In this sense, UNHCR's record in participatory planning is rather inconsistent, though it is not at all clear to what extent this effects sustainability. In Cambodia and Laos, the choice of projects has been largely determined administratively by the specific needs regarding the (re)construction of rural communities, including schools, health dispensaries, potable water, and rural roads and, in some cases, markets (e.g. Laos). In Viet Nam, local authorities, sometimes in consultation with mass organizations such as the VWU, selected the type of project to be implemented, which have also tended to be schools, health dispensaries, and potable water.

Lesson 23 - Participatory methods can help identify projects that are more relevant to the needs of many local people. However, given UNHCR's short-term involvement, the main factors that promote project sustainability are (a) the quality of technical planning and construction, (b) the ability of local authorities to mobilize financial and human resources for ongoing repairs and maintenance, and (c) the ability of UNHCR to engage other organizations to carry on projects where government capacity is weak.

Local and international organizations

282. A key aspect of UNHCR's repatriation and reintegration operations, as well as phase-out strategies, concerns the nature and scope of partnerships and collaboration with local NGOs and international organizations. In this sense, the constraints and opportunities available to UNHCR are largely conditioned by (a) the type and number of NGOs, International Organizations (IOs), and other UN agencies operating in

repatriation areas, and (b) the scope and scale of activities accorded to civil society and international organizations in general. In all three countries, UNHCR worked effectively with both NGOs and IOs. In Cambodia, UNHCR also worked with other UN agencies, including UNDP/CARERE (Cambodia Repat 1 and 2), WFP (e.g. food assistance), and UNICEF (e.g. Anlong Veng). The relative lack of involvement by other UN agencies in Laos and Viet Nam was, however, somewhat surprising.

283. There are several additional factors that influence UNHCR's partnerships with other organizations. The first factor concerns UNHCR's protection mandate, which requires the organization to closely monitor returnees access to services. Some NGOs, for example, may view such efforts as representing inappropriate interference in their own affairs or somehow subverting their relationship with "beneficiaries." This factor seems more prominent in cases where UNHCR is viewed primarily as a donor organization rather than an active partner. The second factor concerns UNHCR's emphasis on short-term inputs and time-bound project implementation. Many potential NGO and IO partners who employ longer-term community development approaches may view UNHCR's approach with some caution. This is especially so when it may require them to use their own resources, or undertake additional fund raising efforts in the future. A third factor is that some NGOs may view work with returnees as being too politicized, involving them more with the government than they otherwise would like. In this sense, NGOs and IOs have their own working relationships with host country governments and mass organizations to consider. Fourth, many NGOs and IOs that are already working in a country have established themselves in a particular geographic area and/or developed expertise in certain sectors. In such situations, agencies may be reluctant to establish themselves in new areas and/or take on additional staff.

Lesson 24 - UNHCR's ability to implement sustainable projects depends on its ability to form long-term partnerships with non-governmental service providers. UNHCR's approach focuses more on commitments made by partner organizations to continue working in reintegration areas after UNHCR phases-out its operation rather than the sustainability of actual inputs. Many obstacles inhibiting such partnerships can be overcome with more advanced planning, information, and frequent communication with organizations in the development community.

Phase-down and exit

284. The above observation concerning the relationship between project sustainability and organizational sustainability represents an important aspect of UNHCR's phase-down and exit strategy. In this sense, the sustainability of project inputs after UNHCR phases out depends on the institutional capacity of the host government and the ability of implementing partners to continue providing services. For example, in Laos, the ongoing maintenance of project inputs is complicated by the fact that (a) few NGOs and IOs have been involved in the reintegration process and (b) the government's ability to sustain even basic services is severely limited. In Cambodia, the situation is somewhat better as there appear to be more NGOs, both local and international (e.g. Emergency, ZOA, MHD, DEEP, Tuk Sa-ath), as well as international organizations (e.g. UNDP/CARERE and UNICEF) who will continue to work in returnee areas after UNHCR has phased down its reintegration operations. In fact, many of these organizations were originally encouraged and supported by UNHCR to become involved in these areas. In Viet Nam, the government has assumed responsibility for the maintenance of micro projects. It is also interesting to note that returnees are no longer considered eligible for special services as

returnees per se. Rather, they are now eligible for services from the government and mass organization on the same basis as other Vietnamese citizens.

Lesson 25 - The sustainability of project inputs after UNHCR phases out its reintegration operations depends on the capacity of NGOs, international organizations, and/or the government to provide and maintain services for returnees. UNHCR can help promote more sustained commitments from partner organizations by (a) integrating phase-out plans more closely with initial project planning, and (b) actively helping partner organizations, especially international and local NGOs, to develop alternative funding sources.

Conclusion

285. The relationship between civil society and the State condition UNHCR's strategic options in how it carries out protection monitoring and forms partnership alliances with international organizations and NGOs to implement repatriation and reintegration assistance. UNHCR, the State, and civil society together create a network of integrative linkages that connect returnees to family, community, employers, government, and service providers. In some cases, strong social linkages enable returnees to achieve sustainable livelihoods when administrative services of providing agencies, including government, are weak. In other cases, integrative linkages can compliment one another to promote positive reintegration outcomes.

286. The ability of people to achieve sustainable livelihoods, a necessary precondition for durable reintegration outcomes, depends on their ability to invest in agricultural production or find gainful employment. In rural areas, the capacity for sustainable livelihoods is strengthened by control over land use rights and access to rural development services. In urban areas, it depends on the ability of people to access credit resources for small business start-ups and vocational training for skill development. In many cases, the ability of people to achieve positive reintegration outcomes may also be rooted in the circumstances of flight and camp residency. Thus, UNHCR's capacity to support sustainable reintegration outcomes depends on the degree to which staff are able to plan, finance, and coordinate activities that consider refugee migration on a continuum spanning flight, camp residency, repatriation, and reintegration.

287. In all three countries, UNHCR has played a vital role in promoting sustainable reintegration outcomes by providing various inputs and small-scale projects for returnees and their local communities. The sustainability of such inputs has often depended on UNHCR's ability to engage international and local organizations in project work from the very beginning. In other cases, sustainability of project inputs has depended on the government's capacity for and attitude toward maintaining such inputs. However, sustainable reintegration outcomes are undermined when people, including EVI cases and disadvantaged women, fall through institutional gaps in the integrative networks. In areas where UNHCR exerts some degree of influence, special efforts must be made to minimize such disparities. For example, UNHCR can help strengthen institutional coverage by improving coordination between its staff in the countries of first asylum and countries to which people are repatriated. UNHCR can also help to strengthen such coverage by continuing to improve its communication with international and local organizations as well as with sister UN organizations.

288. UNHCR's experiences in each country suggest that the State and civil society organizations enjoy certain comparative advantages over one another. For example,

NGOs tend to have a comparative advantage in their ability to target specific groups of people with specialized services (e.g. EVI/Gs). Government, meanwhile, often enjoys an advantage in its ability to mobilize a broader spectrum of resources over a wider geographical area. The strength and vitality of the integrative networks is enhanced when such comparative advantages compliment one another. However, the degree of complementarity between the State and civil society often varies according to the nature of the political regime in power and the amount and quality of available financial and human of resources available to both.

289. In rural circumstances where agricultural is the primary mode of production and government services are chronically weak, UNHCR has collaborated with international and non-governmental organizations to provide services that enable returnees to establish sustainable livelihoods and generate goodwill on the part of nearby communities. In Viet Nam, where many returnees repatriated to urban areas, UNHCR and collaborating organizations worked closely with strong government institutions to provide vocational training and access to credit. In both instances the question for UNHCR has been how to devise strategies that most effectively and efficiently place reintegration assistance in the hands of returnees. In rural situations similar to Laos and Cambodia, therefore, the lesson is to by pass weak government structures whenever possible and place productive assets directly in the hands of returnees. In Viet Nam, the approach has been to provide services through government institutions in a way that requires returnees to access administrative linkages. This observation suggests, comparatively speaking, that the most efficient and sustainable forms of assistance are (a) those that place productive assets directly in the hands of returnees and (b) that the most sustainable mechanisms for doing so are through strong government institutions and/or organizations with the capacity to maintain long-term programming commitments.

290. UNHCR has tended to rely primarily on State agencies and civil society organizations to implement repatriation and reintegration operations. However, it is important to note that returnees have compensated for gaps in such services through social connections with family and community. For example, in Laos many returnees have relied on family connections to accumulate investment capital through overseas remittances and commercial handicraft sales. Returnees also have relied on family and clan members to gain access to land, borrow supplemental food rations, and find employment. In Cambodia, returnees in former Khmer Rouge areas relied on horizontal and vertical relationships within tight-knit socio-political organization to secure land tenure and access to collective goods. In Viet Nam, returnees often returned home to their families where they found shelter and daily sustenance. The integrative network of social, economic and administrative linkages are therefore comprised of both formal and informal institutional arrangements.

291. It is important to note that private sector enterprises represent another set of potential partners, particularly with respect to reintegration activities. This would require a re-orientation on the part of UNHCR in terms of incorporating private sector firms into its mix of potential partners. More attention is warranted in considering the role that private sector firms can feasibly play alongside government, NGOs, and IOs. This being said, involvement with the private sector raises a different set of issues associated with project planning and accountability.

292. Finally, UNHCR should be commended for its efforts to routinely undertake lessons-learned exercises at the conclusion of its operations in a particular country or region. A question in this regard concerns how such lessons can be most effectively used

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to inform future reintegration operations. First, lessons learned exercises would be strengthened by formal meetings with government and international collaborators that focus on country-specific lessons learned (e.g. Viet Nam). Second, UNHCR should consider how to evaluate specific reintegration practices and long-term outcomes. For example, it would be useful to understand the extent to which returnees diverted savings and labour away from agricultural investments to compensate for inadequate food assistance provided during Cambodia Repat 2. It would also be useful, for example, to understand more about how the formal reintegration assistance and informal social networks interact to produce highly stratified socio-economic and political relationships in group-settlements sites (e.g. Laos).