

SIERRA LEONEAN REFUGEE OPERATION

AT A GLANCE



Main Objectives and Activities

Continue basic humanitarian assistance to Sierra Leonean refugees in their countries of first asylum with emphasis on the registration and care of some 15,000 new arrivals; provide specialised care for victims of violence and other vulnerable refugees; relocate as many refugees as possible away from insecure border areas; and begin making plans for their voluntary repatriation as soon as the security situation in Sierra Leone allows.



Persons of Concern*

COUNTRY OF ASYLUM/ TYPE OF POPULATION	TOTAL IN COUNTRY	OF WHICH: UNHCR-ASSISTED	PER CENT FEMALE	PER CENT < 18
Guinea (Refugees)	370,600	370,600	53	59
Liberia (Refugees)	96,300	38,800	51	46
Returned in 1999	3,500	-	-	-

* In addition, other countries in the region hosted more than 20,000 Sierra Leonean refugees.

Impact

- More than 400,000 Sierra Leonean refugees were protected and given basic assistance in asylum countries. Refugees in camps benefited from: a clean water supply and new latrines, reducing the incidence of water borne diseases; medical services, vaccination of children and supplementary feeding, leading to healthier refugees, fewer epidemics and lower malnutrition rates; appropriate shelter materials, avoiding further degradation of the environment; primary education; and agricultural support. The environment was rehabilitated through the planting of seedlings and the use of ecological stoves.

- Transportation to camps further away from the border increased the physical security of refugees in the Gueckedou area of Guinea; and some 12,000 people were relocated from Lofa County to a safer site further south in Liberia.
- Over 10,000 vulnerable refugees (including 91 amputees and 1,747 children separated from their families) were registered and helped with counselling, specialised medical care and family tracing. Sixty victims of violence were resettled.

Income and Expenditure (USD)

WORKING BUDGET	INCOME FROM CONTRIBUTIONS*	OTHER FUNDS AVAILABLE**	TOTAL FUNDS AVAILABLE	TOTAL EXPENDITURE***
7,072,068	3,358,677	3,329,057	6,687,734	3,030,000

* Includes contributions earmarked for repatriation of Sierra Leonean refugees and assistance to victims of violence.

** Includes opening balance and adjustments.

*** Expenditure related to Sierra Leonean refugees in countries of asylum is reported under General Programmes in the Regional Overview for West and Central Africa (Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Liberia).

WORKING ENVIRONMENT

The Context

The civil war in Sierra Leone dates back to 1991 when the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) launched an insurgency. More than 450,000 Sierra Leonean refugees fled to neighbouring countries, mainly Guinea and Liberia, and nearly one million people became internally displaced. Many refugees suffered brutal atrocities, including mutilation and rape, allegedly perpetrated by the RUF. Hopes fuelled by the Abidjan Peace Accord in 1996 were dashed when a military junta ousted elected President Kabbah in 1997. Following the removal of the junta by an Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) force, President Kabbah returned to Freetown in March 1998. However, fighting continued between the rebels and the Government (the latter supported by ECOMOG). This led to tremendous civilian suffering and devastation of the country's meagre infrastructure. All UN international staff were evacuated after an attack on Freetown in early January 1999.

Peace talks finally led to a cease-fire agreement in May, which culminated in the Lomé Peace Accord of July 1999. The UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) was established, followed by an announcement that 11,000 peacekeepers would be deployed. Rebel leaders returned to Freetown in October and a Government of National Unity was formed. This raised cautious hopes that refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) would soon be able to return to their homes.

Constraints

Refugees and most IDPs were effectively prevented from going home by insecurity, which precluded access to many areas by humanitarian agencies and peacekeeping forces. Insecurity was exacerbated by slow demobilisation of ex-combatants. Only 3,500 refugees are believed to have returned spontaneously.

The arrival of 15,000 Sierra Leonean refugees in Guinea obliged UNHCR to scale up emergency preparations. Growing insecurity in the border areas threatened the refugees.

In Guinea, repeated cross-border incursions by Sierra Leonean rebels, especially in the Forecariah region, resulted in the closure of the border. The Government of Guinea stepped up security measures by sending more police officers to the camps and surrounding vil-

lages. Increasing tension between the local population and the refugees was evident in Forecariah where angry villagers at Moola burnt down the nearby refugee settlement following allegations that refugees were lending support to Sierra Leonean rebels who had previously attacked the village.

Armed confrontations in Liberia's Lofa County prompted 12,000 Sierra Leonean refugees to flee 80 km on foot from Kolahun to Tarvey, from where they were relocated to Sinje, a new site in Grand Cape Mount. The camps in Kolahun were then closed. The fate of some 40,000 still in Lofa County was uncertain, as UNHCR could not reach them.

Other problems included: a chronic shortage of trucks; impassable roads during the rainy season (May-October); and the frequent lack of basic facilities at field locations (water, electricity, telephones), which made working conditions extremely difficult.

Funding

The year 1999 began with a carry-over of USD 2.8 million for the Sierra Leonean repatriation and reintegration operation. Since repatriation could not take place, the funding situation for the Special Programme remained favourable and funds were again carried over into the next year. By contrast, activities in asylum countries (under General Programmes) suffered from a chronic funding shortfall and strict earmarking.

ACTIVITIES AND IMPACT

Protection and Solutions

The Governments of Guinea and Liberia adopted a generous asylum policy by granting *prima facie* status to Sierra Leonean refugees under the 1969 OAU Convention. In Guinea, a national eligibility committee was established in May, prior to the promulgation of the draft national refugee law. An accord between the Government and UNHCR, ensuring speedier procedures for refugee status determination, was prepared for adoption. In Liberia, a workshop was organised for the national Asylum and Appeals Committee. UNHCR then assisted the Committee in determining the status of asylum applicants during the initial interviews.

Registration and verification of refugees in Gueckedou in February enabled UNHCR to target its assistance more accurately, especially to vulnerable refugees and victims

of violence. Growing border insecurity led to the relocation of 20,000 Sierra Leonean refugees to Katkama, Faindou and Boodu. In Forecariah, plans were developed for the transfer of refugees (UNHCR helped the Government identify new sites). The arrest of suspected rebels led to heightened security fears among the refugees. UNHCR was given access to the detainees and succeeded in obtaining the release of those found to be innocent. In Liberia, the separation of ex-combatants from civilian refugees in Lofa County did not take place due to security concerns. Another protection concern was that poorly paid Liberian military and law enforcement officers were extorting money from refugees.

The needs of refugee women, children and vulnerable groups, including survivors of atrocities and sexual violence, were addressed through family tracing, counselling, specialised health care and income-generating activities. Some 60 survivors of violence were approved for resettlement in third countries. Regional workshops were organised on the rights of children and on reproductive health (including sexual violence).

Activities and Assistance

Community Services: UNHCR registered about 3,500 physically vulnerable refugees in Guinea, including 91 amputees. Some 1,100 separated refugee children were identified and registered. Nearly 100 were reunited with their families. Children affected by violence received counselling and post-trauma care in some of the camps. In Liberia, very few of the almost 600 separated minors were reunited with their parents. Some parents were traced to Sierra Leone but could not be reunited with their children due to insecurity. Clothing and footwear were given to 5,400 vulnerable refugees. Sanitary kits were distributed to 17,000 refugee women. Vulnerable refugees participated in monthly therapeutic cultural events (dancing, singing and drama). Workshops were held on the prevention of female genital mutilation.

Crop Production: Some 13,000 families in Guinea (40 per cent female-headed) received 18,000 kg of seeds, 9,000 hoes, 5,200 machetes and 980 files. Fertiliser, insecticides and technical support were also provided. This allowed each beneficiary family to produce 350 kg of rice: a seven-month food supply. In Liberia, seeds and tools enabled 2,250 refugee farmers to grow swamp rice and vegetables on 345 hectares of land.

Domestic Needs/Household Support: UNHCR procured 10,800 blankets, 6,100 jerry cans, 13,000 plas-

tic sheets, 6,000 buckets, 13,600 towels, 2,500 kitchen sets, 13 metric tonnes of soap and 10,000 mats and distributed most of it to refugees in Guinea and Liberia.

Education: In Guinea, more than 50,000 refugee children (26 per cent of all school-age children) attended 82 schools staffed by 1,100 teachers. Vocational training was available for 1,950 adolescent refugees. Technical education centres were opened in Massakoundou and Fangamadou; sports, drama, music and gardening activities were organised. Programmes in youth clubs focused on peace education, reproductive health and HIV/AIDS. Psychosocial activities targeted some 6,600 children and adolescents. In Liberia, 8,400 refugee children went to primary school (employing 140 refugee teachers); 230 pupils received secondary school scholarships. Special attention was paid to girls' education with the establishment of girls' clubs in schools. Post-secondary scholarships were provided to 35 students. Some 230 students attended vocational training courses. More than 300 single mothers attended adult literacy classes and skills training. An accelerated learning programme helped 360 children who had never been to school. Twenty-seven primary school classrooms were constructed in Sinje.

Food: As agreed with UNHCR, WFP was responsible for basic food supplies for Sierra Leonean refugees. An acute shortage in the food pipeline halted distribution in Forecariah in October and in Gueckedou in December. In Liberia, UNHCR provided supplementary food to some 5,450 vulnerable refugees. Cooked meals were provided during the relocation of 10,200 refugees from Tarvey to Sinje.

Forestry: Authorities in Guinea were concerned about environmental degradation. A UNHCR consultant prepared a strategic plan, but for lack of specialist agencies only a modest reforestation programme was implemented. In Liberia, refugees and host communities worked together on the establishment of tree nurseries for 30,000 seedlings and the manufacture of 1,600 ecologically friendly stoves.

Health/Nutrition: In Guinea, health care covered vaccinations, essential drugs, reproductive health, vector and anti-malarial control, health education, training of traditional midwives, and nutritional and epidemiological surveys. Fifty per cent of refugee children were vaccinated, and more than 200,000 refugees attended the health centres. Malnutrition stood at 2.3 per cent overall. In Liberia, health care included

reproductive health counselling in camps. More than 160,000 consultations took place. Tubmanburg Hospital and the St. Joseph Catholic Hospital in Monrovia served as referral hospitals. Two wards were constructed in the health centre in Sinje: one in-patient department and one immunisation unit.

Income Generation: More than 1,500 micro-credits were extended to refugees in Gueckedou, with priority to female-headed families and survivors of violence. More than 1,100 of the ventures proved to be viable and 90 per cent of the credits were recovered. In Forecariah, UNHCR supported 200 small business projects, including sewing, carpentry and masonry. Fifty-two per cent of the beneficiaries were women. In Liberia, some 300 female single parents were trained in tie-dyeing and tailoring and then helped to start small businesses.

Legal Assistance: More than 15 protection workshops were organised by UNHCR in Guinea and Liberia, improving the climate for refugee protection. Some 850 persons participated, including government officials, operational partners, UN agencies and donors. UNHCR also helped local humanitarian NGOs strengthen their management capacity through advice and training.

Operational Support (to Agencies): UNHCR provided VHF radio sets to local authorities and security forces in Guinea to reinforce security for both refugees and staff. The administrative costs of implementing partners were covered, including salaries, office rental, office supplies and equipment as well as communications. UNVs reinforced UNHCR's capacity at field locations.

Sanitation: In Guinea, UNHCR launched a campaign to sensitise refugees to the importance of good hygiene. A drama sketch on personal hygiene was acted out in four camps with the help of 85 trainers. This helped reduce cholera and diarrhoea during the rainy season. Some 700 latrines were constructed with active refugee participation. In Liberia, facilities included 94 ventilated pit latrines, 88 bath-houses and numerous compost pits, which were regularly maintained. The hygiene awareness programme continued at all sites. Camp shelters were fumigated twice a year.

Shelter/Infrastructure: In Guinea, 50,000 plastic sheets were distributed as roofing material to avoid environmental damage (from the depletion of natural materials). About 30 communal centres were also

established. In the camps in Liberia, thousands of round poles and thatch were provided for shelters. Some 500 shelters were built for vulnerable refugees in Sinje, in addition to community centres, transit and registration areas, and distribution facilities.

Transport/Logistics: In both Guinea and Liberia there was a chronic shortage of trucks and impassable road conditions during the rainy season. The relocation of refugees (for safety) presented additional logistical demands. This had a knock-on effect on UNHCR's efficacy in other sectors, as fewer trucks were available for food distribution and transport of relief materials. Funds covered the cost of vehicles, spare parts, maintenance, warehouse rental, distribution of food and other items, road maintenance and bridge rehabilitation.

Water: Clean water in the camps in Gueckedou was increased, from an average of 6.6 litres per refugee per day to 9.3 litres, thanks to 33 new boreholes and wells, assiduous maintenance of 940 existing ones, and four new water pumping-stations. In Forecariah, refugees received about 13 litres of potable water per day. In Liberia, 40 existing water points were maintained and 39 new boreholes and hand-dug wells were constructed in refugee camps and surrounding areas in Sinje. Handpumps were also provided. In Sinje, water was also treated and trucked to water bladders and tap-stands.

ORGANISATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Management

The Sierra Leonean operation focuses on three countries: Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Nine offices employed a total of 70 international and 147 national staff, some of whom also worked on issues related to Liberian refugees. The Governments of Australia, Denmark, Norway and Sweden seconded eight experts in community services and technical coordination. Only national staff remained in Freetown until March, when international staff were allowed to return. Poor security precluded the opening of offices in Kambia, Kenema, Segwema, Makeni and Zimmi. UNHCR was unable to return to Liberia's Lofa County after security incidents in August. The office in Kolahun was closed at year-end and staffing in Voinjama and Vahun scaled back pending improved security. In Guinea, it was decided to boost UNHCR's protection monitoring capacity (only three protection staff had been covering more than 300,000 Sierra Leonean refugees in 60 camps in the Gueckedou area). The Regional

Directorate in Abidjan oversaw overall strategy and programme management for Sierra Leonean refugees and gave advice on various operational questions. In August, a plan for voluntary repatriation of Sierra Leonean refugees was developed but remained on hold for lack of access to potential areas of return.

Working with Others

UNHCR worked closely with WFP, UNICEF and UNDP in all three countries. The programme was implemented together with six government agencies, 16 international and eight national NGOs, and one international organisation. In Liberia, a task force (comprising UNHCR, the Government, and NGOs) met frequently, especially during the emergency in Lofa County. A national NGO served as the focal point for PARinAC meetings, coordination and capacity-building. In Guinea, monitoring of implementing partners was difficult, as some of them were receiving additional funding (unbeknownst to UNHCR), leading to duplication. Despite training, some partners continued to demonstrate weaknesses in programme delivery and reporting. The problem was compounded by the absence of an effective NGO focal point within the context of PARinAC. Some NGOs were also unsettled by the decentralisation of UNHCR's programme management.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

UNHCR needs to remain flexible in its response to the needs of Sierra Leonean refugees. Initial plans for repatriation and reintegration proved too optimistic, so the focus of the operation remained in the countries of asylum. This required a reallocation of resources, which, at times, was hampered by strict donor earmarking. NGOs with limited experience need training and support, straining UNHCR's already limited resources. Indeed, effective and accountable programme management requires adequate staffing levels. This was particularly true for UNHCR's protection capacity in Guinea, which will be reinforced in 2000. A strategy to bridge the gap between humanitarian assistance and longer-term development needs to be in place in readiness for a large-scale repatriation and reintegration operation. In late 1999, Sierra Leone was selected as a test case for the Brookings Initiative (involving close co-operation between UNHCR, the World Bank and UNDP).

Offices

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Abidjan

GUINEA

Conakry
Forecariah
Gueckedou

LIBERIA

Monrovia
Kolahun
Vahun
Voinjama

SIERRA LEONE

Freetown

Partners

GUINEA

Government Agencies

Bureau technique du Génie
Direction nationale des Forêts et de la Faune
Direction préfectorale de la Santé
Ministère de l'Intérieur - Bureau national de
Coordination des Réfugiés
Ministère du Plan et de la Coopération internationale

NGOs

Action Contre la Faim
Agence de Développement de la Riziculture et du
Palmier
American Refugee Committee
CARE International
Centre d'Etude canadien et de la Coopération
internationale
Centre rural pour l'Éducation des Adultes
Croix Rouge guinéenne
Danish Refugee Council
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit
Handicap International
Inspection régionale d'Agriculture des Eaux et Forêts
International Federation of the Red Cross and Red
Crescent Societies
International Rescue Committee
Médecins Sans Frontières (Belgique)
Service chrétien d'Animation pour le Développement
des Oeuvres sociales et de Secours

Other

United Nations Volunteers

LIBERIA

Government Agencies

Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement
Commission

NGOs

Action Contre la Faim
Con Bosco Rehabilitation Programme
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit
Dutch Relief and Rehabilitation Agency
Family Empowerment Programme
Initiative pour une Afrique solidaire
International Rescue Committee
Liberians United to Serve Humanity
Lutheran World Service
Medical Emergency and Relief Co-operative
International
Medical Emergency Relief International
Save the Children Fund (UK)
Sustainable Development Promoters

Other

United Nations Volunteers

SIERRA LEONE

NGOs

Danish Refugee Council

Voluntary Contributions (USD)

Donor	Income	Contribution
Canada	300,000	300,000
Finland	349,712	349,712
France	81,786	81,786
Japan	1,400,000	1,400,000
The Netherlands	383,968	383,968
Norway	499,360	499,360
Switzerland	314,465	314,465
UK for UNHCR (GBR)	29,287	29,287
Private donors Japan	99	99
TOTAL	3,358,677	3,358,677

Financial Report (USD)

Programme Overview	Current Year's Projects	notes
Opening Balance	2,802,053	(1)
Income from Contributions	3,358,677	(1)
Other Funds Available	527,004	
Total Funds Available	6,687,734	(5)
Expenditure	3,030,000	(1) (5)
Closing Balance	3,657,734	(1) (5)
Expenditure Breakdown*		
Community Services	229,647	
Domestic Needs / Household Support	121,205	
Education	55,769	
Health / Nutrition	78,653	
Income Generation	881	
Legal Assistance	29,438	
Operational Support (to Agencies)	261,310	
Sanitation	23,055	
Shelter / Other Infrastructure	86,812	
Transport / Logistics	398,653	
Water	1,232	
Instalments with Implementing Partners	604,042	
Combined Projects	37,957	
Sub - total Operational	1,928,654	
Sub - total Disbursements/Deliveries	1,928,654	(5)
Unliquidated Obligations	1,101,346	(5)
TOTAL	3,030,000	(1) (5)
Instalments with Implementing Partners		
Payments Made	995,555	
Reporting Received	391,513	
Balance	604,042	
Outstanding 1 January	0	
Refunded to UNHCR	0	
Currency Adjustment	0	
Outstanding 31 December	604,042	
Unliquidated Obligations		
Outstanding 1 January	0	
New Obligations	3,030,000	(1) (5)
Disbursements	1,928,654	(5)
Cancellations	0	
Outstanding 31 December	1,101,346	(5)

* For expenditure in the asylum countries, please refer to the Regional Overview for West and Central Africa.

Figures which cross reference to accounts
(1) Annex 1 to Statement 1
(5) Schedule 5
(6) Schedule 6