



COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN

Country: Uganda

Planning Year: 2004

Part I: Executive - Summary

1.1 Context and Beneficiary Populations

UNHCR's presence in Uganda dates back from the 1960s. Though the earlier arrivals of Rwandan refugees had returned in 1994, the country still hosts 18,500 Rwandans who are residual caseloads of the 1996 repatriation from Tanzania. There are some 5,000 Rwandans who entered Mbarara district of Uganda from Tanzania when the Rwandan refugees were being repatriated from there in 2002. The Government of Uganda has not yet decided their status. The majority of the refugees in the country today are Southern Sudanese hosted in northern Uganda and who number about 172,300 (86%) of the total refugee population of 200,800 as of 28 February 2003. About 8,500 Congolese refugees hosted in the Southwest are from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). There are other smaller groups from Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya that are also being assisted. Sudanese and Congolese refugees are granted status on a *prima facie* basis, while the status of others is ascertained through individual refugee status determination. Almost all the refugees fled their respective countries of origin because of the civil war and fear of persecution caused by ethnic rivalries and political differences.

The Government of Uganda, continues to host refugees from the neighbouring countries. Refugees who are in designated settlements are provided with agricultural lands, tools and seeds with the objective of making them self-sufficient. As a result, refugees in the northern settlements have managed to produce a certain percentage of their food requirements, thereby reducing dependence on the food assistance from WFP. As there appears to be no significant policy change in the provision of land to refugees, it is expected that the same approach towards self-sufficiency in food will continue in the planning year. The level of self-sufficiency was at times negatively affected by unfavourable climatic conditions.

It should be noted that Northern Uganda, where the large majority of the refugees are settled, remains economically marginalised. It also continues to suffer from constant rebel attacks of the Lord Resistance Army (LRA). This limitation has also prevented refugees from accessing farmlands located at reasonable distances from the settlements. Refugee settlements on the fringes are often attacked, people abducted and food looted. Since rebel attacks do not exclusively target refugees, the nationals too suffer. For the planning year, UNHCR Uganda has therefore considered possible precautionary security measures for staff, partners and the operation as a whole. Although it has proved difficult to secure all areas, the Government of Uganda has made a commitment to provide the necessary security to refugee settlements as well as nationals in the surrounding villages in the rebel prone areas. In early August 2002, following the most serious attack by LRA, about 50 people were killed and 24,000 Sudanese refugees were forced to flee Achol-pii camp in Pader District. The rebels also looted and destroyed vehicles and other property allocated for refugee programme.

The number of registered Sudanese refugees being assisted in Adjumani and Moyo Districts of northern Uganda is 91,600. Of this total, ethnic groups from Eastern and Western Equatoria regions represent about 93 percent. The remaining 7 percent, which include Dinkas and Nuers, comes from Bah-el-Gazal and the Upper Nile regions. The majority come from an agricultural background including the pastoralist Dinkas. Although the movement of refugees from Sudan in the last three years has not been significant, there had been an influx of about 1,800 refugees to Moyo District towards the end of 2002 and beginning of 2003. UNHCR

does not expect big influxes for the planning year unless a drastic change happens to the situation. The Government of Sudan had allowed the Ugandan army (UPDF) to pursue LRA in Southern Sudan during the first quarter of 2002. The Sudanese Government has extended the presence of UPDF in Southern Sudan for similar activity in 2003. The small number of Sudanese who arrived in the Districts of Moyo and Arua recently have indicated the cause of their flight to be worsening economic situation aggravated by the - continuing unstable security situation in Southern Sudan. Possible causes that may trigger a big influx into Northern Uganda include the following:

- Some armed factions traditionally allied to the governing National Islamic Front (NIF) in the South have been continuously and openly questioning their *raison d'être* in the war against the South. This defiant attitude has positioned these former allies against the more zealous government militia of the Popular Defence Force. In the last two to three years, allegiances to Khartoum and SPLA have been shifting, leaving the situation still unpredictable.
- Another factor could be the continuing three-dimensional bombing by the Government of Sudan in the South to destabilise the administration of the SPLA controlled areas.
- Some views have been expressed about the ambivalent attitude of the SPLA leadership in the face of the newly evolving policy of the “New Sudan” as opposed to the original objective and purpose of “self-determination.”

Despite the continued unpredictable situation in Southern Sudan, some hope for possible repatriation of the Sudanese refugees is being perceived. If the Machakos peace process concludes successfully, the voluntary repatriation of the Sudanese refugees could be a reality in 2004. However, such a repatriation could not be expected to be sustainable and successful if increased reintegration activities in the Southern Sudan are not carried out simultaneously by various players. Furthermore, the efforts of reintegration can contribute to the process of peace and - positive-reconciliation among the different ethnic groups upon return to their places of origin.

The implication of the above scenarios for the planning year generates the need for constant analysis of the political developments in the Sudan and the region. This requires the periodic revision of the Contingency Plans to accommodate -r possible influx as well as - repatriation of Sudanese refugees. The assessment to be concluded could be carried out through co-ordination with Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS), the Regional Technical Services Centre (RTSC), field visits to Southern Sudan and information gathering from BO Khartoum and NGOs operational in Southern Sudan.

Nakivale and Oruchinga in south-western Uganda are the two major settlements for Rwandan refugees. The 18,500 Rwandan refugees hosted in these settlements are basically under care and maintenance programs due to a shortage of land for self-reliance. Their level of self-sufficiency in food is not comparable to that of the settlements in the north. The South West of Uganda is densely populated and hence, in the last two years, there have been considerable encroachments by nationals on land designated by government for refugee settlement. Oruchinga, the most productive in terms of agriculture, could not adequately accommodate all the refugees and Nakivale is not suitable for agriculture.

There had been little prospect for voluntary repatriation of Rwandan refugees from Uganda since - 2002. Subsequent to the repatriation from Tanzania UNHCR Uganda was anticipating the repatriation of Rwandan refugees -, starting with the signing of a tripartite agreement by the two countries and UNHCR in 2003. However, recent tensions between Uganda and Rwanda, characterised by mutual accusations of harbouring each other's rebel groups and dissidents and the deployments by both countries of troops along their common border and in Ituri Province of the Democratic Republic of Congo have complicated the situation. The situation does appear conducive for the signature of a tripartite agreement and for subsequent voluntary repatriation of Rwandan refugees in Uganda. In addition to the Rwandan refugees already recognised in Uganda, there has been an influx of more than 5,000 Rwandans who had previously accessed international protection in Tanzania. The irregular movement of these Rwandans occurred during a period of 5-6 months in 2002 and they are located in Nakivale, Mbarara district in Southwest of the country.

UNHCR had foreseen the irregular movement of Rwandan refugees in Tanzania once the repatriation from Tanzania to Rwanda commenced. The Government of Uganda has not recognised them as refugees. As long as the current situation of heightened tension and mutual suspicion exists, it is difficult to anticipate that a durable voluntary repatriation programme of Rwandans refugees from Uganda will be implemented.

There are 8,500 Congolese from DRC who are hosted in Kyaka II, Kyangwali and Nakivale. A good number of Congolese refugees living in Kyangwali and Kyaka II are heading towards self-sufficiency. The situation in the DRC should still be considered as unpredictable. On the one hand, on-going regional peace talks on DRC raise hopes for possible voluntary repatriation of Congolese refugees. Other positive indications include the convening of the long-awaited Ituri Pacification Commission (IPC) which has recently been launched in the DRC town of Bunia in Ituri province and the signature of a cease-fire agreement between the Lendu, Hema and other ethnic groups involved in the conflict in eastern DRC. On the other hand, there has been an influx of a large number of Congolese in the Northwest of Uganda bordering with DRC (in Nebbi district). Since the Congolese are along the borderline and - are not willing to be transferred to refugee settlements in Arua district which have been designated by the Government of Uganda as refugee hosting locations. To date, Government has not articulated its position with regard to these refugees. UNHCR is yet to witness concrete results of IPC in order to be able to plan for any eventual repatriation or for a possible influx in mid-2003 or in the planing year.

The Self-Reliance Strategy (SRS), a joint strategy drawn by the Government of Uganda and UNHCR, aims at integrating the refugee services into the government system of service delivery and enable the refugees to be self-reliant. SRS was launched in 1999. However, the implementation of the SRS gained momentum largely only after a directive came from the Minister for Disaster Preparedness and Refugees to all administrative and political leaders in the refugee hosting districts in early 2002, instructing them to commence implementation of SRS-related activities. Therefore, where feasible, sectoral activities (based on the capacities of districts) were integrated and sub-agreements were signed with the districts.

The collaboration with the Government and Implementing Partners on implementation of SRS has started paying dividends in improving, to some degree, the quality of life- in the refugee settlements. The Government of Uganda and host communities who generously provided land to the refugees under right of use for the time they are in exile has been instrumental in ensuring that refugees progress towards self-reliance. Partial food self-

sufficiency, albeit affected by intermittent dry spells, has been achieved. Integration of services for refugees with those provided for Ugandan nationals, like education, health, environment, and community services in selected districts has made good progress. In the planning year, integration and consolidation strategies will be initiated and more activities will be moved from NGO implementing partners in the interest of integration and strengthening the SRS.

This will entail more government line ministries coming on board as UNHCR partners and a reduction in the involvement of NGOs as implementing partners. The BO will plan a series of training workshops to familiarize the new government partners on UNHCR's financial and reporting requirements (some workshops are already scheduled for the current year). It is expected that there would be significant headway towards SRS in the planning year with more integration and substantial reduction of parallel programs in the operation. A favorable development towards integration of services which took place in 2001 was the formulation of the National Health Sector Strategic Plan. Provisions in this plan are that it will be incorporated into the District Development Plan and will render services to both nationals and refugees.

NGOs involved in the health and education sectors were included in this plan for 2003 and already some UNHCR funded activities have been shared with district line ministries. Similarly, in the education sector a joint proposal by the Ministry of Finance and UNHCR was presented to the Education Sector Consultative Body to solicit the inclusion of refugees in national sectoral plans. The above is an indication of achievements made, as in some refugee hosting districts the integration process into the national programme has taken place and refugee children are already benefiting from the Universal Primary Education (UPE).

The important step taken in bringing together the crosscutting policy priorities in education, community services and health sectors that constantly underscore the protection linkages will be continued in planning year. Efforts will be made to improve the quality and standards of assistance in the basic areas of education, health, water, sanitation and shelter within the limits of the resources available. Activities such as health care for women and children, promotion of education for the girl child, HIV/AIDS programs for adolescents, the integrated community-based approach to environmental concerns and programmes for refugees with special needs will all be streamlined through co-ordination mechanisms. It is expected that an in-depth analysis of all provisions would lead to achieving the common goals linked to the protection aspects of the refugee programme.

It is also hoped that in addition to cost effectiveness, better services will be delivered. The parameters and standards set in service delivery will be reviewed and assessed thoroughly during the planning year. Further, it is expected that the integration process in addition to augmenting harmony between refugees and nationals would continue to encourage government to consider including refugees in national and/or district-level planning. An important comparative advantage on the part of UNHCR is, of course, a progressive approach towards the assistance and protection of the protracted refugee caseload in Uganda.