

# **COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN**

**Country: Sierra Leone**

**Planning Year: 2002**

**Prepared by: Branch Office, Freetown**

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## **Part I: Executive Committee Summary**

### **(a) Context and Beneficiary Population(s)**

- Political context;

The cease-fire agreement signed in Abuja in November 2000 has overall been respected by all parties. In spite of the departure of the Indian and Jordanian troops in late 2000, the international community, through the UNAMSIL, has maintained a high level of commitment to the resolution of the Sierra Leonean conflict. The holding of credible general elections towards the end of the year 2001 or the formation of a Government of National Unity including all interest groups will be key to the establishment of a political context allowing the attainment of peace and stability in the country.

Since the events that saw the collapse of the Lome peace agreement in May 2000, the Government has made efforts to rebuild a national army with the technical assistance of the British Government. Although there has been encouraging signs of the RUF willingless to bring the conflict to an end, the ultimate goals and objectives of the rebel movement remain however unclear. The political situation in the two main countries of asylum namely Guinea and Liberia will also significantly impact on refugee/returnee movements.

The volatile nature of the political situation in Sierra Leone and the variety of scenarios that could unfold render any planning exercise difficult. At the time of preparing the present document, two years have elapsed since the signing of the Lome Peace agreement and there has been virtually no progress towards alleviating the suffering of war affected populations. With the exception of the Kambia District, main returnee areas are still under rebel control. It is felt that neither the Government nor the International community will be able to afford further delay in finding a solution to the Sierra Leonean conflict. By early 2002, there should either be a major breakthrough allowing the commencement of an organized voluntary repatriation operation or a resumption of the conflict, preventing the implementation of most humanitarian activities.

The situation in the Lofa County and in Liberia as a whole raises major concerns. A deterioration of the security situation in Liberia could result in up to 15,000 Sierra Leonean refugees having to return to their country. An influx of Liberian refugees in the course of 2002 should also not be ruled out.

All scenarios mentioned above are unlikely to materialize simultaneously. The present plan is therefore primarily based on the assumption that the Sierra Leonean conflict will not resume and that some 100,000 Sierra Leonean refugees will be able to return to their homes in conditions of safety and dignity from asylum countries or from temporary settlements established in the country during 2001. It is also anticipated that those returnees unable to return to their homes in the course of the year 2000 and 2001 will be able to do so in the course of 2002. Should the status-quo continue, approved budgets will be utilized in a flexible way to meet the actual needs including those of returnees registered in 2000 and 2001, unable to return to their places of origin.

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- Security situation;

As mentioned above, the security situation in the country will be highly dependent upon the evolution of the political situation and more specifically on the options chosen by the different parties to bring the conflict to an end. Should the assumptions made above not materialize and the status quo observed during 2000 and 2001 prevail, most returnees will only be able to temporarily settle in Government controlled areas. Assistance to returnees in temporary settlements and, to a lesser extent, in host communities will however continue.

- Protection issues;

#### *Liberian refugees and asylum seekers*

The overwhelming majority of refugees and asylum seekers in Sierra Leone are Liberian nationals. Following the completion of the organised voluntary repatriation programme in December 1999, 6566 registered Liberian refugees remained in Sierra Leone. In order to review the protection requirements of this residual caseload, UNHCR embarked on an individual screening exercise. Some 7,006 Liberians presented themselves to UNHCR during the screening exercise conducted in the course of 2000 and 2001. At least 460 of these were asylum seekers who were newly approaching UNHCR for refugee status. Their claims were assessed as part of the screening exercise. There were also reports of several hundred new asylum seekers arriving in Sierra Leone in March 2001, as a result mainly of armed conflict in Lofa County. They are located in border areas where UNHCR has limited or no access. Basic registration of these new asylum seekers is being carried out in collaboration with NGOs present in these areas. UNHCR plans to request the Government to recognise the new influxes as prima facie refugees under the OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of the Refugee Problem in Africa. The deteriorating situation in Lofa County is likely to lead to additional influxes of Liberian refugees and reduce the chances for voluntary repatriation of the residual caseload.

#### *Sierra Leonean returnees*

During the year 2002, UNHCR will be involved in promoting or facilitating the return unless the following conditions are met:

- Absence of hostilities;
- Ongoing disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration;
- Law and order maintenance by the police;
- Security maintenance by UNAMSIL;
- Unhindered access to the main areas of return secured by United Nations forces and humanitarian workers;
- A presence of the district and local administration established in these areas; and
- A sizeable spontaneous return movement of internally displaced persons to areas where facilitation of repatriation is to take place.

UNHCR will however continue to advocate for the rights of returnees residing in camps or in host communities who will not have access to their places of origin.

- UNHCR's role (protection, assistance, monitoring, coordination);

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## Liberian refugees/asylum seekers

Most of the remaining Liberian refugees have been living in Sierra Leone since the early days of the Liberian civil war. Very few chose to repatriate during the organized voluntary repatriation program which started in 1997 and was concluded in December 1999. In the absence of application of the cessation clause deeming Liberians no longer to be of concern to UNHCR due to fundamental changes in Liberia (unlikely in the foreseeable future), only those who did not meet the criteria for refugee status at the time of their departure from Liberia or at the time of their interview can be screened out as not being of concern to UNHCR. The individual screening exercise conducted in 2000 and in 2001 revealed that 8 percent can be formally screened out at this stage.

It is expected that more than 6,500 individuals of concern to UNHCR are likely to remain in Sierra Leone. However, if conditions in Liberia do not deteriorate, 40% of the population could be expected to return. Another 7% of the population will be submitted for resettlement to a third country. There are plans to target the remaining 53% of the population, for local integration, either due to their continued need for international protection or on humanitarian grounds. Humanitarian factors include the fact that approximately 20% of the refugees have developed strong family links in Sierra Leone over the years.

For refugees who cannot be expected to repatriate at this stage, UNHCR will continue to promote local integration as the most appropriate durable solution. This will entail negotiating with the Government regarding their future legal status in the country and the possibility of local integration and facilitating naturalization for those who meet Sierra Leonean citizenship requirements.

Furthermore, the Office will build upon self-reliance activities commenced in 2000 and in 2001, targeting refugees considered as having valid reasons relevant to refugee status for not repatriating and/or considered as vulnerable. In 2002, UNHCR will offer material assistance to approximately 3,500 of these refugees, in an effort to continue encouraging their local integration and economic independence. They will benefit from vocational training, receive agricultural inputs and livestock, counseling, family tracing, education and limited financial support for income-generating activities (through micro-credits). The most vulnerable refugees will receive food and assistance to cover the cost of primary health care. The Office will also ensure that refugee children in vulnerable families are able to attend school, since the screening exercise revealed significant non-school attendance following premature termination of education assistance in 1998.

Legal assistance for refugees will include provision of identity documents and birth certificates for the large proportions of refugee children born in Sierra Leone who lack birth registration/ certificates.

Protection and assistance provided to Liberian refugees will be coordinated by UNHCR in close cooperation with the National Commission for Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Resettlement and implementing partners. Although Sierra Leone is a party to the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees as well as the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, international obligations under these Conventions – although observed in practice – are not yet adequately reflected in domestic legislation. In the absence of legislation or government procedures for determination of refugee status, UNHCR continues to fulfil this role. As part of Sierra

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Leone's progress towards lasting peace and normality, UNHCR will build up the capacity of the Government to assume responsibility for refugee status determination and other refugee protection issues coming within states' normal sovereignty. UNHCR therefore plans to assist in drafting relevant legislation, setting up procedures, recruiting and training staff for the National Commission for Reconstruction, Resettlement and Rehabilitation, and provision of information materials and technical advice.

#### Sierra Leonean returnees

Assistance provided to Sierra Leonean returnees will primarily depend on the situation prevailing in the country as outlined above. The current plan is based on the assumption that by the beginning of 2002, the security and political situation will allow UNHCR to promote return in conditions of safety and dignity both from asylum countries and from temporary settlements established in 2000 and 2001. It is therefore anticipated that towards the last quarter of the year 2001, humanitarian access to the main areas of return will be possible.

Arrangements will be put in place for the transportation and reception of returnees, including support structures providing assistance to vulnerable persons. In cooperation with the Government, sufficient transit centres will be established, accompanied by measures ensuring harmonious relationship of returnees with local populations.

Assistance to returnees will comprise of two main components: Individual assistance in the form of a package given to each refugee family and community-based short-term reintegration programmes - benefiting both returnees and the local population in main areas of return - in the form of Quick Impact Projects (QIPs).

The repatriation assistance package per family of five (5) will consist of a two month food ration to be provided by WFP and of a non food items package as per regional standards. Non-food items will be distributed upon arrival at final destination. Seeds and farming tools will be provided upon arrival at final destination by the FAO. Assistance will be closely coordinated with programmes being funded by the European Union (EU), the World Bank (WB), NGOs and other organisations. After the initial 2 months, former refugees and IDPs alike, will be expected to benefit from WFP's Targeted Feeding Programmes including Food for Work (FFW) and other programmes implemented by the Government and other agencies

Community based assistance will primarily focus on reintegration which, in the context of Sierra Leone, will require close cooperation with other agencies involved in reconstruction, rehabilitation and reintegration activities for former internally displaced persons, former combatants and destitute populations. Returnee District Area Profiles will be established so as to assess the response provided to the needs of the civilian population and define specific requirements of returnees.

By the end of the year 2002, UNHCR will have established mechanisms to ensure that returnees are placed in a position to effectively resume economic activities and have access to community based infrastructure upon their arrival.

Systematic monitoring of returnees will be undertaken through UNHCR, government counterparts, implementing partners and other NGOs. Partnerships built with other agencies involved in monitoring the human rights situation of IDPs will be strengthened in order to harmonise returnee and IDP protection monitoring, maximise resources and information sharing, and raise the overall standards of protection for IDPs as well as returnees.

- Overview of each beneficiary population (numbers, origin, demographic composition) and/or theme being addressed

#### Liberian refugees and asylum seekers

The number of assisted Liberian refugees is not expected to increase drastically unless the situation deteriorates in Liberia. The current document plans for the protection of 6,500 while material assistance will be provided to only 3,500 of them.

#### Sierra Leonean returnees

It is expected that some 100,000 Sierra Leonean returnees will be assisted in the course of the year 2002 as per the table hereafter. They are expected to return to their places of origin in the Kono, Kailahun, Kambia and Pujehun Districts.

#### Assisted returnee population

Origin	2001	2002
Guinea	65,000	30,000
Liberia	20,000	15,000
Internal movement	*14,500	**50,000
Elsewhere	500	***5,000
Total	100,000	100,000

- \* Arrived in 2000 residing in settlements or host communities in 2001
- \*\* Arrived in 2001 to be transferred to their places of origin in 2002
- \*\*\* From Ghana, Nigeria, Gambia and elsewhere

- Policy issues;

UNHCR's involvement in IDP protection and assistance issues as most refugees who returned to Sierra Leone in the course of 2000 and 2001 were unable to return to their places of origin will require close attention. UNHCR was initially expected to play a lead role in protection and assistance in relation to IDPs in main areas of return. As a result of the present situation, it will also be UNHCR's responsibility in 2002 to facilitate the return of this caseload to their final destinations.

- Linkages to other countries within a defined "situation";

Coordination with other Offices in the region will continue to be mainly ensured through the Regional Directorate for West and Central Africa and the Repatriation cell formed in March 2000 to oversee the repatriation of Sierra Leonean refugees. Comprising of Representatives of Offices in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea, the cell has been meeting on a regular basis under the leadership of the Deputy Regional Director for West and Central Africa.

- Capacity and presence of implementing partners;

Cooperation will continue during 2002 with most partners implementing activities in favor of Liberian refugees and Sierra Leonean returnees in the year 2001. In cases where there might

be an agreed upon lack of capacity, efforts will be made to call on international organizations with proven expertise to establish activities in Sierra Leone.

- Presence and roles of other UN agencies and international organizations, and efforts made to coordinate activities for the implementation of protection and assistance activities for populations of concern.

The Sierra Leone United Nations Country Team under the leadership of the Humanitarian Coordinator will most likely decide that a Consolidated Appeal for 2002 is required. It will include UNHCR budgets and planned activities in Sierra Leone as well as provide an opportunity for a unique cooperation with other United Nations Agencies. Common goals and objectives as well as scenarios will be agreed upon, avoiding duplication of efforts through clearly defined responsibilities for assistance to the various categories of war affected populations.

The so-called “Brookings Process”, which aims at bridging the gap between short-term humanitarian relief and longer-term sustainable development interventions, initiated in February 2000 will be pursued through encouraging all organizations involved in reintegration of returnees, IDPs or ex-combatants to set up a joint coordination structure responsible for managing all reintegration activities.

**(b) Selected Programme Goals and Objectives**

Name of Beneficiary Population/Theme: Liberian refugees/Asylum seekers	
Main Goal(s): Protection and assistance for Liberian refugees/asylum seekers.	
Principal Objectives	Related Outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build the capacity of the Government to meet protection needs of refugees and asylum seekers;</li> <li>• Ensure that the protection requirements of Liberian asylum seekers are met;</li> <li>• Implement the durable solution recommendations of the screening exercise;</li> <li>• Facilitate the local integration of Liberian refugees in need of international protection and identify resettlement opportunities ;</li> <li>• Ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable are met.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enactment of national legislation and administrative procedures, creation of an agency mandated to address refugee and asylum matters, training of staff;</li> <li>• Monitoring of the protection situation and living conditions of refugees and asylum seekers;</li> <li>• Develop voluntary repatriation and naturalization sensitization campaign, pursue resettlement applications;</li> <li>• Identify the needs of the most vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers and provide targeted assistance</li> <li>• Provide income generating opportunities</li> <li>• Provide primary and secondary education assistance to most needy families</li> </ul>

Name of Beneficiary Population/Theme: Sierra Leonean returnees	
<p>Main Goal(s):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Return and reintegration of Sierra Leonean refugees from asylum in conditions of safety and dignity.</li> <li>• Assist returnees in hosting communities/temporary settlements pending their return to areas of origin</li> <li>• Return and resettlement of returnees currently in hosting communities/temporary settlements to/in areas of origin.</li> </ul>	
<b>Principal Objectives</b>	<b>Related Outputs</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that returnees are able to resume economic activities enabling them to rebuild their lives and reach self-sufficiency.</li> <li>• Ensure that refugees make informed and voluntary decisions based on the current situation in Sierra Leone; and</li> <li>• Ensure that returning refugees in hosting communities/temporary settlements are able to reach some degree of self sufficiency</li> <li>• Ensure that the protection requirements of returning refugees are met.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess how the socio-economic, political and security situation in the country would affect the needs of Sierra Leonean returnees ;</li> <li>• Compile Returnee District Area Profiles taking into account the security need of potential returnees to those Districts ; and</li> <li>• Depending on the improvement of the security situation, facilitate and later promote the voluntary repatriation of Sierra Leonean refugees and help them reintegrate in their communities of origin.</li> <li>• Provide income generating opportunities</li> <li>• Monitor the condition of returnees through local authorities and NGOs</li> </ul>