

# The Benefits of Belonging

Local  
integration  
options and  
opportunities  
for host  
countries,  
communities  
and refugees

ORIGINAL

**LOCAL TAX RECEIPT 2010**

PUJEHUN DISTRICT COUNCIL  
21903 \*

**LE 5,000 PUJ**

Local Authority *Malen chiefdom*

Name of Tax payer *Achan A. v. Konneh*

Tax Collection Area *Gandoshun*

Date *15/4/10* Issued By *[Signature]*

Designation *Chief*

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“ WHEN WE CAME FIRST THEY WERE AFRAID TO BE WITH US, BUT WE ARE ALL FRIENDS NOW. WE UNDERSTAND ONE ANOTHER. NOW THEY SAY WE ARE THE SAME PEOPLE.”

Alhaji, Refugee Chairperson, Gerihun

## Alhajis' story: Gerihun, eastern Sierra Leone

Alhaji is a former Liberian refugee living in Gerihun, a rural village in Eastern Sierra Leone. He first fled to Sierra Leone in 2002 and after many years here, has chosen to locally integrate.

Alhaji is an active member of his local community: he and his wife foster children and he is the chairperson for refugees living in the village, a mixed community of hosts and refugees. An experienced

electrical engineer, he would like to use these skills again, if given the opportunity. In the meantime, he earns a living as a woodcutter, using a power saw that he bought with start-up funding from UNHCR and provides a much-needed service for the whole community.

Alhaji like his fellow Sierra Leoneans, pays taxes and is proud to contribute economically as well as socially, to Sierra Leone, his adoptive country.

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The Brochure 'The Benefits of Belonging' was produced under the auspices of UNHCR's Operational Solutions and Transition Section (OSTS) in the Division of Programme Support and Management. The editorial team Sajjad Malik ,Chief of Section, OSTS, Yasuko Shimizu Senior Operations Officer, OSTS, and Gabi Kent, Peacebuilding Consultant, thank all those who contributed to the preparation of this brochure.

For more information, please contact:  
Operational Solutions and Transition Section (OSTS)  
Division of Programme Support and Management  
UNHCR  
hqts01@unhcr.org

# Foreword

Over half of the refugees for whom UNHCR is responsible find themselves trapped in protracted situations, where they have lived for years or even decades on end. One of the most pressing tasks confronting UNHCR and the international community is to resolve such situations.

No one-size-fits-all response will work but experience has shown that approaches emphasizing the complementarity of solutions and containing a significant burden-sharing component are more likely to succeed.

Four-fifths of all refugees reside in developing countries, frequently those of immediately adjacent neighbours. The re-establishment of peace and security in countries of origin enables refugees to return and reintegrate and is the solution generally preferred by them.

When return is not possible, resettlement of part or all of the refugee population to third countries provides a solution for the individuals concerned and demonstrates tangibly international solidarity and burden-sharing with the host

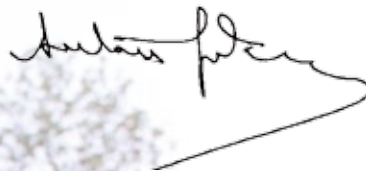


States. This can contribute to a more favourable environment for the smaller number of refugees who remain.

For countries already bearing heavy burdens hosting refugees, I understand fully the reluctance to embrace fully-fledged local integration without secure assurances of adequate support from the international community. UNHCR is working hard to bring just such commitments into place – to anchor a “new deal of burden-sharing.” Only with resettlement and voluntary return maximized, and a more equitable sharing of the responsibility for hosting refugees, can we hope to see more receptivity to local integration.

It is in this context that I welcome this brochure, which examines the opportunities of local integration

from the perspective of key stakeholders: host and donor governments, refugees and local communities, international and non-governmental organizations. Even where local integration may not be possible, there may be opportunities for increased self-reliance, allowing refugees in asylum countries to contribute more readily to the societies and economies of their hosts. Working together, I am confident we can realize the “benefits of belonging.”



António Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees



# From burden to benefit: an introduction to local integration

## Overview

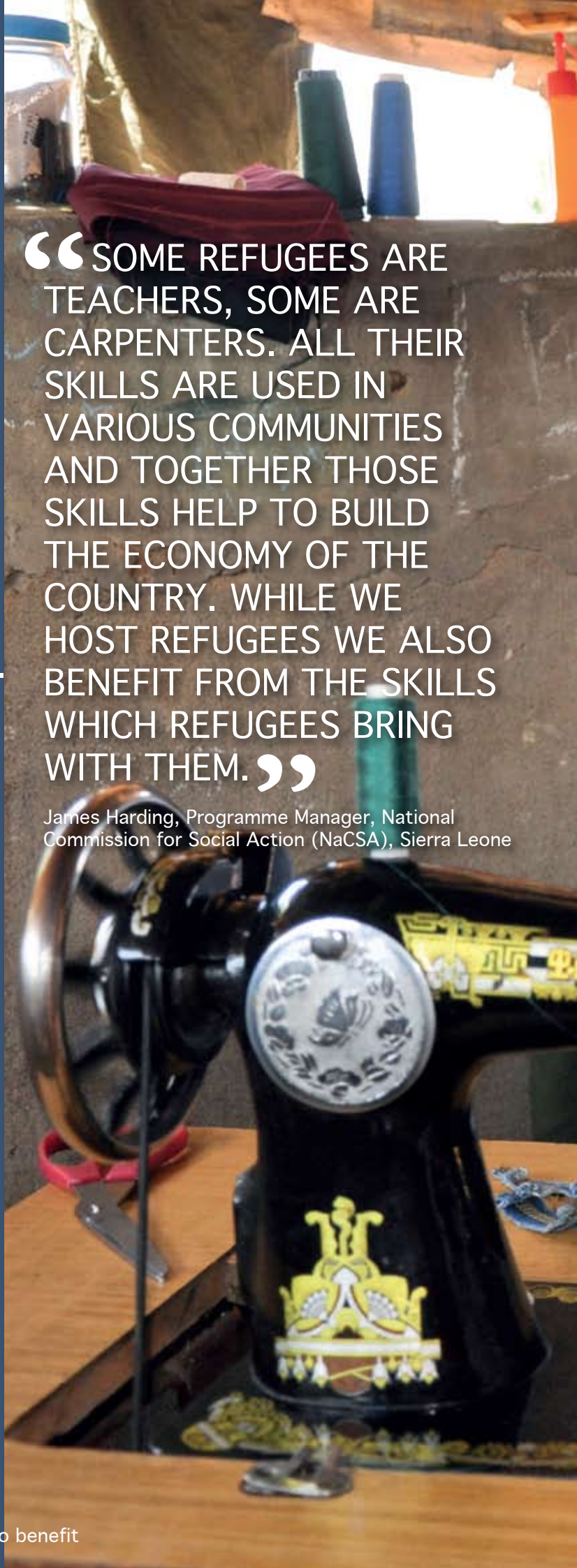
People become refugees for many reasons, not least because of violent civil conflicts in which ordinary citizens are the greatest victims. This has led to large numbers of women, men and children being forced to seek sanctuary in their neighbouring countries and further afield. These people can remain displaced for years, or even decades. Some may fear that the prolonged presence of refugees will have a negative impact on their community or country.

In reality, if given the opportunity to integrate and belong, former refugees are able to be self-reliant and to contribute socially and economically, in many cases becoming an asset to their host States.

*Local integration* is one of the three ‘**durable solutions**’ for refugees developed by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in partnership with host and origin countries. The other durable solutions are voluntary repatriation to the refugees’ country of origin, and resettlement in a third country.

“SOME REFUGEES ARE TEACHERS, SOME ARE CARPENTERS. ALL THEIR SKILLS ARE USED IN VARIOUS COMMUNITIES AND TOGETHER THOSE SKILLS HELP TO BUILD THE ECONOMY OF THE COUNTRY. WHILE WE HOST REFUGEES WE ALSO BENEFIT FROM THE SKILLS WHICH REFUGEES BRING WITH THEM.”

James Harding, Programme Manager, National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA), Sierra Leone







**Local integration** is particularly relevant when people cannot return to their country of origin in a foreseeable future, or have developed strong ties with their host communities through business or marriage. It is based on the assumption that refugees will remain in their country of asylum permanently and find a solution to their plight in that State, possibly but not necessarily through acquiring citizenship. It is a way to allow them to rebuild their lives, to become self-sufficient and generate new livelihoods as contributing members of their host societies. Many host governments recognize this, welcoming support from outside agencies to implement formal local integration strategies that turn potentially disruptive human displacement into a national asset.

More than 100 refugee-hosting countries around the world, from

Argentina to Sierra Leone, offer at least some of their refugee populations local integration as a durable solution. Adopting a **local integration strategy** is not dependent on the relative wealth of the host nation: participating countries range from richer countries like Germany and Canada to low and lower-middle income economies such as Liberia, Ecuador and the United Republic of Tanzania. The latter group are amongst the world's most generous hosting nations.

Local integration is all about partnerships and collaboration between agencies and countries in the pursuit of collective solutions. Ultimately, however, both the vision and leadership of host governments and the support of the international community are critical to the ongoing success of local integration strategies.



# The process: a strategy for belonging



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Local integration is a dynamic and multifaceted two-way process between refugees and their hosts in which refugees gradually become integrated members of society legally, economically and socially.

Whilst refugees often find ways to integrate informally in their host countries while in exile, evidence shows that implementing a finely balanced set of measures leading to the formal integration of displaced people has positive consequences for the society and economy of host countries. A well-implemented local integration strategy can enable displaced people to give as well as receive: to work legally, to pay tax and to contribute to the economy of their new home country. Many refugees are well-educated and highly skilled. They may be teachers, midwives and doctors, as well as farmers and business people.

A national local integration strategy also enables agency and donor support to be built into development planning in the host country. UNHCR programmes such as *Development Assistance for Refugees* (DAR) place both the concerns of refugees and those of their host communities on development agendas. They mobilize additional development assistance from the international community and improve burden-sharing with countries hosting a large number of refugees, to deliver benefits to both refugees and host countries.

Different partners use different terms for local integration processes, but all share the same objectives: to support processes which **end the plight of refugees** and to **support communities that take people in** and offer them a future in that country.

Host governments ultimately determine how their local integration strategy is designed and

implemented, but each successful strategy shares three core dimensions: legal, economic and social.

The **legal** dimension involves the establishment of a legal framework in which refugees gradually attain a wider range of rights in the host State - possibly, but not necessarily, leading to full citizenship and naturalization.

The **economic** dimension involves enabling refugees to establish sustainable livelihoods and a standard of living comparable to their host community. UNHCR works in partnership with host governments in a number of countries to facilitate economic integration, self-reliance and entrepreneurship programmes, which benefit the local community as well as refugees.

The **social** dimension of local integration utilizes social and cultural frameworks to enable refugees to access education and social services as well as to participate in the social fabric of the community. Developing a sense of **social and cultural belonging** leads to better social cohesion in the long term.

This document shows how, working together, host governments, UNHCR and other agencies can design and implement community projects such as agricultural activities, language schools, community bakeries and even billiard clubs to break down barriers, promote tolerance and create social networks between refugees and local people.

This tripartite process allows the full range of economic and social benefits of local integration to be shared by refugees and host communities alike.

# Three case studies

Mechanisms for introducing local integration as one of the three durable solutions for refugees have been refined by experience and practice over the years. The following case studies highlight the practical experiences of three very different countries that are working to introduce coherent local integration strategies: Tanzania, Belarus and Sierra Leone. These

countries, among others, have developed innovative and good practice for local integration using their own experiences, as well as those of UNHCR and other stakeholders. Each has developed different pathways to introduce measures - for some countries legal rights are the first step, for others, refugees' self-reliance and economic participation are the starting point.

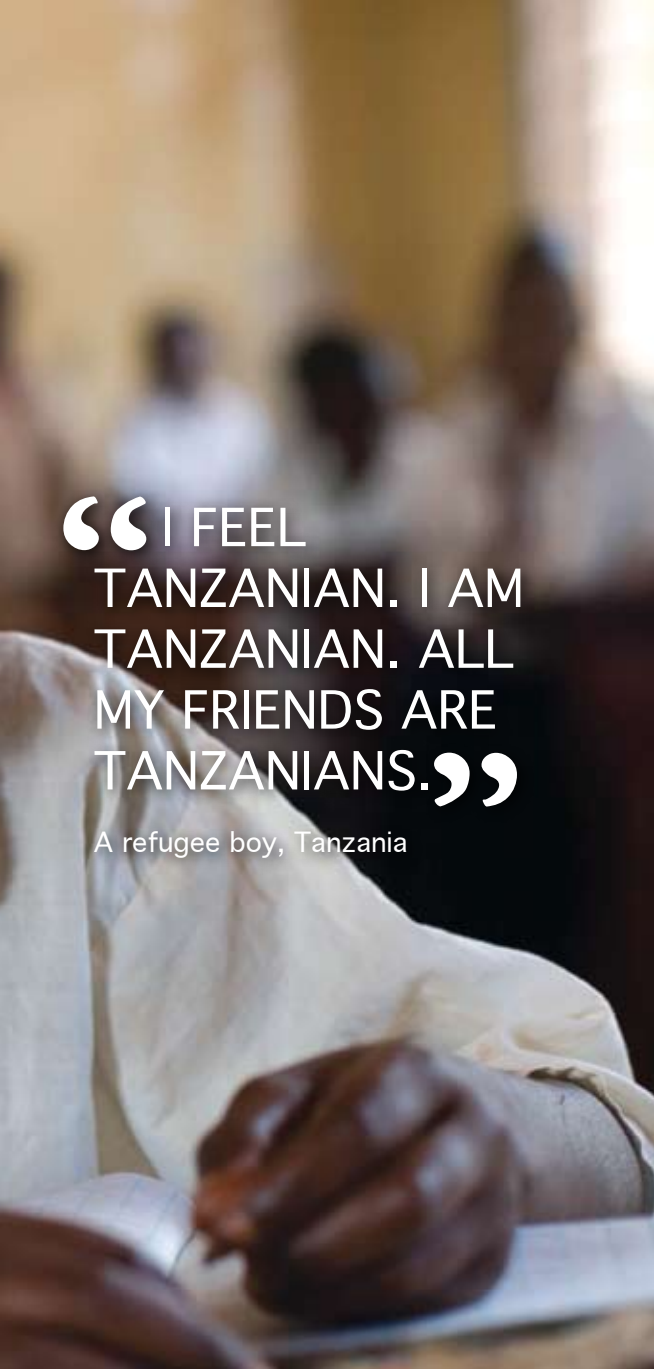


## The United Republic of Tanzania: new beginnings



“ NOW WE ARE  
A BRANCH ON  
A TREE CALLED  
TANZANIA. ”

Headman, Katumba settlement



“ I FEEL  
TANZANIAN. I AM  
TANZANIAN. ALL  
MY FRIENDS ARE  
TANZANIANS. ”

A refugee boy, Tanzania

## Context

The United Republic of Tanzania is internationally recognized for its leadership and visionary approach to hosting refugees. As one of the largest refugee-hosting countries in the world, it provides asylum to over 274,000<sup>1</sup> people, many of whom have been unable to return to their homes for decades.

Tanzania’s progressive refugee policies in the 1970s and 1980s have enabled the country’s largest group of refugees to become self-sufficient. This group formed the majority of the over 150,000 people who fled a wave of violence in neighbouring Burundi in 1972 and are now known as the ‘1972 Burundians’.

The Government of Tanzania allocated five hectares of land per refugee family in three designated areas, known locally as the “Old Settlements”. Over the years, the refugees have turned their settlements into some of the more productive land in Tanzania. Food crops grown by these communities make up over one third of the agricultural produce from their districts, while in the main tobacco-growing region, almost half of this cash crop has been produced by the refugee farmers, contributing to the national economy.

<sup>1</sup> As of June 2010.  
This includes newly naturalized Tanzanians who have not yet been locally integrated.

In 2007, following the peace process in Burundi, the Governments of Burundi and Tanzania, and UNHCR, agreed to work together to find durable solutions for these people. A census was conducted in the “Old Settlements” in which refugees were individually registered and their intentions recorded. This process was coupled with a detailed study of the social, economic and demographic situation of the refugees. On the basis of this information, the three partners launched a comprehensive solutions strategy, known as TANCOS, for approximately 218,000 newly registered refugees of the Old Settlements. TANCOS offered voluntary repatriation for those who wanted to return to Burundi and naturalization and local integration for those who wished to remain in Tanzania.

Some 170,000 people opted to remain in Tanzania and build their future here as new citizens, starting with the process of naturalization.

## Citizenship matters

The majority of people who opted for naturalization and citizenship are from the younger generations of the ‘1972 Burundians’. Born in Tanzania, they attended local schools, speak Kiswahili, and in some cases have married local Tanzanians. Though they may have lived in Tanzania all their lives, worked hard and built livelihoods, their refugee status has been a barrier to full belonging. The opportunity to become Tanzanian citizens enables them to formalize their legal status and take their place as full members of society.

Newly-naturalized Tanzanians are required to apply individually for a citizenship certificate. This ensures citizenship is seen as a personal privilege and something that people qualify for, while maintaining wider public support for the process. For

these new citizens, this step is the beginning of a process of belonging that has eluded them for the past 40 years. On the basis of their new legal status, newly-naturalized Tanzanians will be supported through a formal process designed to allow them to integrate as full members of Tanzanian society, outside of the three original “Old Settlements”.

## Developing a national strategy for community integration

One challenge facing the Government of Tanzania was how to socially integrate these new citizens and promote national cohesion. The Government’s willingness to integrate such large numbers of people stems in part from how well this population responded to the original self-reliance promoting policy. Newly-naturalized Tanzanians have demonstrated their understanding of local cultures and languages and an ability and willingness to contribute positively to Tanzanian society. Rather than keeping these new citizens in one region and potentially crystallizing a Burundian ethnic identity, a strategy of dispersal has been devised to ensure full social integration into Tanzanian society.

To facilitate this process, the Government of Tanzania and partners developed the National Strategy for Community Integration Programme (NaSCIP) to enable former refugees to take up their full set of rights as citizens in their adopted country. Sixteen regions were selected, based on availability of land and consultation with local authorities and include eight out of ten locations preferred by the former refugees, indicated in a 2008 household survey.

“ WE ARE HOPEFUL THAT AS SOON AS WE BECOME CITIZENS OF TANZANIA WE WILL BE ABLE TO DO MORE. WE ARE CONSIDERING GOING BACK TO STUDY TO ENABLE US TO BECOME TEACHERS, DOCTORS, MANAGERS AND ECONOMISTS. ”

Ogeste Gelevasi, Lukama Village, Mishamo Settlement



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“ THE THING THAT WE ASK OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY IS THAT IT UNDERSTANDS THAT WE DON'T WANT THESE PEOPLE TO REMAIN IN THE SAME CAMPS – THE OLD SETTLEMENTS. LET THEM LIVE IN OTHER COMMUNITIES, MIX AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE WITH OTHER TANZANIANS. IT MAY CAUSE A BIT OF PROBLEM IN TERMS OF TRYING TO ASSIST THEM, BUT WE KNOW OUR SITUATION BACK HOME. IT CAN BE DONE IF THE IDEA IS ACCEPTED. ”

Mizengo Peter Pinda, Prime Minister of Tanzania (2008)

The Government of Tanzania has also designed a communication strategy to inform local authorities, local communities and newly-naturalized Tanzanians about local integration and to engage them in this process.

For former refugees relocating from the “Old Settlements”, this is a new beginning and while it involves considerable change, it also offers new opportunities. Financial support and relocation packages have been created for the newly-naturalized Tanzanians, who will also be given assistance in acquiring land to ensure they can remain self-reliant. Those who are more vulnerable, such as the elderly or infirm will receive additional support. It is anticipated



that these new citizens will bring economic benefits to the areas where they are resettled, as they are already a highly productive, skilled and self-sufficient agricultural and trading labour force.

In the host communities, a range of initiatives including livelihood support, housing, land and community development projects are being set up to support integration. These will bring benefits to the newly-naturalized and to their new neighbours, enhancing community development and peaceful coexistence.

Sustained international assistance for the implementation of NaSCIP

is crucial: to assist the newly-naturalized with moving, to develop comprehensive programmes promoting national cohesion and security, and to expand social services in the 16 regions selected for the relocation of the former refugees.

## Building new partnerships

Finding durable solutions for such a large number of people requires particularly strong partnerships between governments, donors, humanitarian and development agencies, implementing partners, and the refugees themselves.



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the Burundian refugees' situation to an end, has attracted support from the wider donor community too. Development partners with specific sectoral interests and expertise, bilateral agencies, and multilateral organizations outside the UN system are engaged in the process. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland's Department for International Development (DFID) has directly provided over US\$ 7m to support the comprehensive solutions strategy, including the local integration of former refugees in Tanzania. It will also help to cover the immediate needs of these newly-naturalized Tanzanians during the transitional period and provide extra capital towards expenses such as additional construction materials as they start their new lives.

“ THE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT OF TANZANIA, UNHCR AND DONORS HAS HELPED TO CHANGE THE REFUGEES' LIVES FOR THE BETTER AND BRING THEM LONG-TERM CERTAINTY. THE TANZANIAN GOVERNMENT, ESPECIALLY, SHOULD BE COMMENDED FOR ITS BOLD DECISION TO GRANT CITIZENSHIP TO MORE THAN 165,000 BURUNDIAN REFUGEES. ”

Darren Welch, Head of DFID Office, Tanzania

This ambitious local integration project will involve the relocation of up to 180,000 persons. A formal local integration strategy enables the inclusion of local integration needs into national development planning, as part of the wider United Nations Development Action Plan (UNDAP). In addition to operational partnerships with UN agencies, efforts will continue to bring the resources of the UN family, including the World Bank, to bear for the benefit of the Tanzanian programme, by seeking more direct financial support through UNDAP prioritization.

The historic effort by the Government of Tanzania, to bring

Such partnerships will be of increasing importance as the programme moves into the longer-term development phase, beyond 2012.

Ten years after peace was negotiated in Burundi, the unprecedented gesture of the Government of Tanzania is closing the chapter on one of the longest displacement stories in Africa. The local integration of such a large number of refugees will also contribute to regional stability by reducing the burden of receiving communities in Burundi. It is early days and to ensure this remarkable local integration process is successfully implemented and sustainable, continued international support is vital.



# The Republic of Belarus:

‘People’s friendship is people’s strength’

## Context

The Republic of Belarus is a relatively young country, having gained Statehood in 1991. It has a small population of recognized refugees - fewer than 1,000. Over 70 per cent of the recognized refugees are from Afghanistan and are culturally and ethnically very different from their host community. A smaller number are from Asia and Africa, and several are from countries close by such as Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia.

UNHCR has been working in partnership with the Government of

Belarus on humanitarian assistance for refugees and people seeking asylum since 1995. Local integration soon emerged as a logical solution for those who had received refugee status in the country.

Today, Belarus has a policy of integrating refugees from the moment they arrive in the country, even as they wait for their legal status to be determined. This approach has evolved from a process of implementing pilot projects in the areas of housing, education and





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Recognized refugees enjoy the same rights as Belarusian citizens, and the focus now is on ensuring that all refugees can access these rights and integrate fully. The ability to work and be self-reliant is regarded by both refugees and the Government as the gateway to social and community life in Belarus and is an area where Belarus is achieving impressive results.

This highly practical and effective approach to integration is having a direct and tangible impact on the lives of refugees and host communities. Community-run businesses combine work and friendship between Belarusians and refugees. Schools, community centres and businesses are sites for cultural exchange and shared experiences between Afghan, Georgian and Belarusian families. New generations of children are growing up who see themselves not as refugees but as citizens of Belarus - while still retaining a sense of pride about their own cultural heritage.

employment, with localized success, coupled with capacity building at a local and national level. Relationships of trust have developed between UNHCR, the Government, local authorities, refugees and local communities, which has paved the way for more formal State support to local integration. This, in turn, has increased opportunities for international support to facilitate more effective integration.



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“THE ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF FOREIGNERS IN THIS COUNTRY AND THE INDEPENDENCE OF THESE PEOPLE AND THEIR FAMILIES REDUCES THEIR DEPENDENCY ON THE GOVERNMENT. WE WANT TO BUILD THESE PEOPLE AS CITIZENS OF THE COUNTRY, TO BE A BENEFIT TO SOCIETY, TO BE THE SAME AS OTHER CITIZENS OF THE COUNTRY, TO MAKE THEM FULLY-FLEDGED MEMBERS OF SOCIETY.”

Tatiana Tumashik, Department of Citizenship and Migration, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Belarus

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## From local to national: the evolution of a strategy

An initial study on local integration of refugees was undertaken in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, with funding from the European Union (EU) in 2007–2008. The Government of the Republic of Belarus subsequently agreed to a proposal by UNHCR to prepare a project and approach the European Commission (EC) for support in creating a national strategy for

integration. In 2009, a regional project called ‘The local Integration of Refugees in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine’ was developed between these three neighbouring countries.

With assistance from the EC and UNHCR, the Government of Belarus has continued to develop its national capacity for designing and implementing local integration strategies. The Belarusian implementation process is threefold: the development of a legal framework establishing equal legal, social and economic rights for recognized refugees; regular ‘sensitization’ or national awareness-raising programmes paving the way for integration between national and local authorities, local communities

and refugees; and a range of initiatives to enhance the practical implementation of integration on the ground.

The development of a systematic approach to local integration, and the activity of national forums in which all stakeholders discuss local integration practice, has transformed how integration is approached.

“ WE HAVE A SYSTEM OF COLLABORATION HERE AND IT IS WORKING EFFICIENTLY. THIS SYSTEM IS PERHAPS STILL AT THE DEVELOPMENT STAGE, BUT IT ENABLES US TO MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE STATE PROGRAMME THAT WE COULDN'T DO BEFORE. ”

Tatiana Tumashik, Department of Citizenship and Migration, Ministry of Internal Affairs

In 2011, these stakeholder recommendations will be included in the State Programme on Demographic Security, a draft piece of legislation. This Bill is seen as the first step to handing over ownership and responsibility of local integration to the national authorities. For such a young country things have come a very long way.

### Integration in Practice

On the outskirts of Gomel, in a quiet residential area, children play on painted wooden swings and slides in front of a pink and white building. This is Gomel's temporary accommodation centre for refugees and vulnerable Belarusians and sits in the heart of the local community. Currently there are seven people residing here, and the centre has the capacity to house up to 24.

The Sahar<sup>2</sup> family are the newest residents. Having recently fled Afghanistan, they have been provided with temporary accommodation while their refugee status is determined. As part of the integration process, the family is taking Russian language classes. The teacher is a former Afghan refugee, working for a local community-based organization which supports newly-arrived refugees through the integration process.

The centre is also a 'one-stop shop' for a range of social services for refugees, asylum seekers and vulnerable local people in need of social support. It offers psychological counselling and information on legal, housing and social rights. This 'mainstreaming' approach concentrates services in an area and facilitates empathy and understanding between locals and refugees.

<sup>2</sup> The name of this family has been changed.



“ REFUGEES CAN SEE THAT THERE ARE PROBLEMS IN BELARUSIAN SOCIETY AS WELL – THAT THERE ARE OTHER VULNERABLE PEOPLE NEEDING ASSISTANCE, SHOWING COMMON ISSUES AMONGST ALL PEOPLE. THIS IS WHY THE CENTRE WAS CREATED IN THIS WAY. ”

Alexander Semionov, Committee of Labour, Employment and Social Protection, Gomel Region

Regional authorities, the Belarus Red Cross Society and UNHCR work together to ensure refugees have access to employment and social welfare support. Ultimately, however, self-reliance lies at the heart of the Belarusian local integration strategy, and this is where an innovative social entrepreneurship scheme excels.

## The role of social entrepreneurship

A large neon sign for ‘Golden Ball’, Gomel’s premier billiards club, glows against the evening sky. Billiards is a popular local game and this refugee-run venture has become a focal point for the local community. It is the result of two years of hard work, during which UNHCR and the District Labour Committee worked closely with the Afghan community organization in Gomel to nurture the idea, conduct market research and develop a viable business plan. The local authorities provided support with the legal and bureaucratic processes of establishing a business, and UNHCR provided advice, seed funding of USD 58,000 and the business model.

In 2005, an enterprising young Afghan called Daud, from the ‘Foundation of Forced Migrants “Integration A”’, proposed a number of business ideas for Gomel, one of which was the Golden Ball Billiard Club. Daud, who has emerged as a

“ IT’S A SIMPLE STORY REALLY ”

Alexander Semionov, Committee of Labour, Employment and Social protection, Gomel Region





natural community leader, is now the director of Golden Ball, which employs 14 people, six of whom are refugees. The club is making a profit and supports a wide range of community services for all refugees in Gomel, including the language course taken by the Sahar family. It is also a social hub where Belarusians and refugees work and play together, and many have become good friends as a result.

“ THIS IS THE FIRST TIME I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO GET TO KNOW REFUGEES. WE ARE MORE THAN JUST CO-WORKERS. WE HAVE WEDDINGS, BIRTHDAYS, FOOTBALL AND BILLIARD TOURNAMENTS ... IT IS LIKE A FAMILY. ”

Anastasia, Belarusian staff member, Golden Ball

For Daud, it has been a personal story of success too. He received his Belarusian citizenship two years ago. One of the qualification requirements for citizenship is employment and Daud is not only employed, he is now an employer - of both refugees and Belarusians.

## Developing the model

The Belarusian model of entrepreneurship coincides with UNHCR's core objective: to empower refugee communities to help themselves via successful projects. Revenue-generating community-based organizations (CBOs) for refugees were piloted in 2003 in Belarus in the three main cities of Gomel, Grodno and Minsk. CBOs serve as social support groups for refugees and, in keeping with the Belarusian political system, provide a mechanism to lobby city, district and national authorities on refugee issues and concerns.

To help the CBOs to sustain themselves, UNHCR launched a pilot

national competition to generate community business ideas that could provide employment for both refugees and Belarusians.

To compete successfully, businesses needed to be self-sustaining and profit making, as profits are used to cover the costs of running the community and refugee support functions of the organizations. This innovative mechanism has generated a range of successful community businesses, including the BelaGeorgia bakery in Grodno and the Golden Ball Billiard Club in Gomel.

UNHCR and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) catalyze the process by putting refugee leaders and social entrepreneurs together with a good business idea, seed capital and the lessons from previous projects. The resulting CBOs have thrived. Successful CBOs generate further ideas for community ventures and empower more community members to participate. They provide and fund services like language classes, which foster integration, raise awareness and promote inter-community relations.

## From one generation to the next

In 2010, with full support from the Government, and funded by the EC-Regional integration scheme, UNHCR launched another competition for community business ideas. The winning social enterprise is based in the city of Minsk, and the business creates work for refugee women.

All refugees may struggle to secure employment in their countries of asylum, even when they are skilled professionals, as many find themselves without their professional documentation and have language limitations. For women and older generations in particular, however, employment opportunities may be hard to find, because of cultural and gender-based constraints.

Fareda is in her fifties and is one of the founders of the new social enterprise. A biology teacher in Afghanistan, she has not been able to find a job in Belarus, and with three children and a disabled



husband to support, life has been very hard. Fareda's hobby is sewing. She makes finely embroidered pillowcases and tablecloths for friends and neighbours. Twice a week, she attended the Afghan Women's Club in Minsk. Established by UNHCR to empower women and support income-generation skills and activities, the Women's Club is now run by the Afghan CBO in Minsk. Here Fareda and other women would drink tea, cook and sew together and share their problems. The main topic of conversation: how to find formal employment.

The idea of establishing a sewing factory to produce high-quality goods emerged through discussion amongst the club's women, the Afghan community and UNHCR, who had been seeking entrepreneurial ideas to support women. From this collaborative process, 'The Empire of Linen' was born. For UNHCR, this venture is a valuable way of supporting employment for women, building on existing community skills. For Fareda, it is an opportunity to generate income and become a more active and valued member of wider Belarusian society.

After months of preparation, market research and a presentation to the Ministry of Labour, local evaluators and UNHCR, the business plan for the venture has been approved. UNHCR will be investing USD68,000 in this project, for technical equipment, rent and running costs during the first four months. After this, the Empire of Linen will be expected to meet its own costs as the next successful refugee-run Belarusian community business.

Iliyaz, the son of the local Afghan community leader, was pivotal to the success of The Empire of Linen bid, and will be the manager of the enterprise. He has grown up in Belarus and is a bridge between the older members of the Afghan community and wider Belarusian society.



*Zora shows two of the many certificates she has gained studying at School 136 with the help of CCA Evrika. She is now in her third year of accountancy at college and is the pride of her family.*

“ FROM THE MOMENT REFUGEES COME INTO CONTACT WITH THE MINISTRY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS THE FIRST QUESTION IS: ‘ARE YOU WORKING AND WHERE ARE YOU WORKING?’ IF THEY NEED A LOAN FROM THE BANK, THE INSTITUTION ASKS: ‘ARE YOU WORKING AND WHERE ARE YOU WORKING; WHO CAN GUARANTEE THE CREDIT?’ IF THE REFUGEES HAVE MONEY, THEY CAN HELP CHILDREN, THEY CAN HELP THEIR FAMILY. THIS ENTERPRISE IS A GATEWAY INTO LIFE. ”

Iliyaz, Manager, The Empire of Linen

### **Not refugees, just people**

For the younger generation the challenges of integration are also being addressed. Belarus places great emphasis on refugee children sharing the same access to education and the same opportunities for success as locals.

School 136 in the Frunzenski District of Minsk, with 200 asylum and refugee children in attendance, is exemplary. Rather than creating a parallel system of education for these children, the Ministry of Education and local authorities work closely with UNHCR and its implementing partner, The Centre for Children and Adolescents Evrika (CCA Evrika), to ensure that the

young refugees can integrate easily into the Belarusian education system.

Additional Russian language classes and study groups have been created at School 136 to help refugee children keep up with their Belarusian peers. Afghan language and cultural classes, which foster inter-community understanding, are also offered. CCA Evrika also runs a well-attended after-school club for children and their families, offering advice and a counselling service for those who need it.

Fifteen-year-old Lida has flourished with the educational and emotional support provided by Evrika.

“ EDUCATION AND SUCCESS DEPEND ON YOU AND YOUR WORK AND KNOWLEDGE. MONEY MAY HELP WITH EDUCATION, BUT FIRST AND FOREMOST IT IS DOWN TO ME. ”

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Lida was first displaced when she was two years old. The Islamic Republic of Iran, the Czech Republic, Russia and Pakistan are just some of the countries she can remember passing through in search of asylum. In 2005 her family were given refugee status in Belarus and could settle at last. She enjoys the stability and security this brings to her life. Russian language classes have eased her transition into school life, and Afghan classes remind her of her heritage. Some of her Belarusian friends come to Afghan class too, to learn the Farsi language.

For Lida, like many children schooled in this way, the identity of ‘refugee’

is now irrelevant. She sees herself as just the same as everyone else, not as a refugee but as a citizen of Belarus. As for her future, though hard, she would like to study medicine: “Education and success depend on you and your work and knowledge. Money may help with education, but first and foremost it is down to me.”

Two young friends and keen footballers, a Georgian and a Belarusian, describe the secret of successful integration as ‘friendship’: “Friendship and common interest”, says one. “Like us and football!” volunteers the other. And off they go to finish their game.



# Sierra Leone:

## ‘Bode Seia’ - we’re all one family

### Context

The Republic of Sierra Leone is on the road to peace and development, following a devastating ten-year conflict, which ended in 2002. The Government is reliant on continued international support to be able to meet the huge challenges that lie ahead. Sierra Leone ranks near the bottom of the UN Human Development Index. Over 60 per cent of its population is unable to afford more than one meal a day and 70 per cent of its young people are unemployed.

During the conflict, thousands of people fled Sierra Leone, with over 3,000 finding asylum in the neighbouring Republic of Liberia, a country experiencing its own brutal civil war. At the height of the Liberian conflict, more than 60,000 Liberian refugees sought asylum in

Sierra Leone. Following voluntary repatriation, approximately 9,000 Liberians remain in Sierra Leone and are in need of long-term solutions to their situation.

UNHCR is working with the Government of Sierra Leone to find durable solutions for the Liberian refugees as part of a regional initiative for the local integration of some 79,000 Liberian and 14,000 Sierra Leonean refugees within West Africa. With the support of UNHCR, the Sierra Leone Government launched a national strategy for self-reliance and local integration of Liberian refugees in 2008. Now being implemented, its hallmarks are consultation, creative problem-solving on land rights, and peaceful coexistence.



agencies, working together for the collective future of Sierra Leoneans and their 'brothers and sisters' from Liberia. Local and national stakeholders meet once a month as part of this innovative programme to discuss issues and problems, and to assess monitoring feedback related to the practical implementation of local integration programmes.



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As Paramount Chief and Member of Parliament, Mohamed Dhaffie Benya represents 15 local chiefs at a national level, as well as looking after the needs of citizens in his local chiefdom. He sees refugees as his people too.

“ WE CALL THEM ‘MA BODE’,” HE EXPLAINS. “IT MEANS ‘MY FAMILY’, THAT WE ARE ALL ONE FAMILY. THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE BETWEEN US. IN FACT WE ALMOST WONDERED WHY IT TOOK THIS LONG TO MAKE FORMAL WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN OUR COMMUNITIES ANYWAY. ”

## Reciprocity

In a traditional round conference room in Kenema, eastern Sierra Leone, an animated discussion on the benefits of local integration is taking place. In attendance are the Paramount Chief, the City Mayor, representatives from the Ministries for District Health and Social Affairs, representatives from the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA, the government department in charge of refugees), CARITAS (a local implementing partner) and UNHCR staff. The atmosphere is warm and respectful. Everyone knows each other and this subject well.

This kind of gathering is not a one-off in Sierra Leone. Local integration here is truly a partnership between national and local government, host communities and international

There is a spirit of reciprocity in this region, based on close cultural and ethnic ties and a shared experience of the devastation of war.

“ PEOPLE KNOW SUFFERING AND SO IT IS NOT JUST ONE-SIDED. THEY KNOW WHAT IT IS LIKE WHEN PEOPLE ARE LOOKING FOR A SAFE HAVEN, THEY DON'T NEED TO EXPLAIN TOO MUCH. ”

Valentin Tapsoba, UNHCR Representative, Sierra Leone

# Developing a strategy: the importance of partnerships

The Government of Sierra Leone takes its international obligations towards refugees very seriously. Local integration as a durable solution was, however, a new idea to them until a series of discussions with UNHCR, information-sharing with continental neighbours and pilot studies stimulated design of a model for local integration as the way forward of choice.

In 2007, a UNHCR-organized research trip to Uganda allowed representatives from NaCSA to explore and evaluate self-reliance strategies there that could also open the path to local integration for refugees in Sierra Leone. On their

return, the NaCSA representatives set up various pilot schemes providing a small number of families with support for their shelter and livelihood. These allowed NaCSA to identify what worked best in a Sierra Leonean context. The pilots showed the potential benefits of such an approach for the whole community, so the Government expanded the scheme to one of local integration throughout the country, building on the lessons learned. Integrating refugees in Sierra Leone have the same rights to work, health and education as locals, in return for adhering to local rules and customs. Support is now given for people to build new homes, and microcredit and livelihood schemes have been introduced.

From the outset, the design and implementation of local integration has been approached through consultation with national and local partners, and with the inclusion of the major stakeholders in the decision-making process.

“CONSULTATION IS VITAL. IT IS THE LOCAL AUTHORITY WHO WILL BE WITH THESE PEOPLE IN THEIR COMMUNITIES. IF THEY DON'T ACCEPT THE REFUGEES AND YOU AS A GOVERNMENT JUST GO THERE TO COERCE THEM TO DO SO, THE SCHEME WILL SIMPLY NOT SUCCEED.”

James Harding, Programme Manager Relief and Resettlement, NaCSA



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## The community perspective

Yaweima, a small rural village in Paramount Chief Benya's chiefdom of Small Bo, is host to a number of Liberians who have chosen local integration. They are not seen as refugees here, but as valuable members of the community. This village suffered greatly during the war in Sierra Leone. Homes were destroyed, crops burned and many people were killed or left the area.

"Since these people [the refugees] came, the community has regained its standards. Facilities that were never here are now here and their presence is helping us to recover from the trauma we have gone through. So indeed we are taking these people as one of us now."  
Morie, town spokesperson

Liberians and Sierra Leoneans live and work side-by-side in this busy farming community, which appears to be thriving. As this is harvest time, most of the younger people are in the fields working, or using the communally-owned rice machine to grind rice to take to the market. Local people believe the success of

the process is due to the inclusion of the whole community in the decisions on integration from the earliest stages.

“BEFORE REFUGEE FAMILIES LEFT THEIR CAMPS TO COME HERE, SOMEONE FROM EACH HOUSE IN OUR COMMUNITY WENT TO MEET WITH THEM, SO WE COULD SEE HOW WE WOULD LIVE WITH THESE PEOPLE. THIS HAPPENED MANY TIMES BEFORE THEY CAME INTO THE COMMUNITY AND IT SET THE FOUNDATION FOR THE GOOD RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN US. NOW YOU CAN'T TELL WHO IS A REFUGEE AND WHO IS A HOST.”

Jeneba, member of Yaweima host community



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The introduction of a comprehensive local integration strategy is already proving positive for communities like Yaweima. Refugees contribute to their local community economically and socially. They pay taxes and share new skills and resources with their neighbours. Local integration is introduced via community-based development that benefits everyone. This has led to tangible benefits such as new wells providing clean water for locals and refugees, and rice mills and processing machines which improve the income of the whole community. Housing support is provided to integrating refugees to build new homes, and also to 10 per cent of the more

vulnerable members of the host community.

Strong bonds of friendship and support have also developed between people in this community.

“MY WIFE DIED LAST YEAR AND THEN MY SON. PEOPLE HELPED ME HERE. MYSELF AND MY DAUGHTER ARE THE ONLY ONES LEFT. THIS COMMUNITY IS LIKE A FAMILY.”

Sahr, refugee leader, Yaweima

Consultations and partnerships have also been crucial in mainstreaming health and education services at district and local level. As part of this process, local infrastructure is being improved as schools and clinics are built or rehabilitated.

Finally, these partnerships have paved the way for innovative solutions to potential barriers to the integration process.

## Making self-reliance sustainable: it's all about land

“FOR ME THIS IS ABOUT POSTERITY – WITH LAND RIGHTS COMES POSTERITY.”

Veronica Modey-Ebi, Senior Protection Officer, UNHCR, Sierra Leone

Self-reliance and the active contribution of refugees to their host communities are crucial if local integration is to be possible, never mind sustainable, in a country as impoverished as Sierra Leone. In an agricultural economy, self-reliance is largely dependent upon access to land, making land ownership a central concern to all stakeholders in refugee programmes. Land security also acts as an incentive for refugees to integrate, as it offers them a tangible stake in society.

In Sierra Leone, unlike many countries in the region, availability of land in rural areas is not an issue. Land ownership, however, is more complex. Most land outside cities is communally managed and decisions are made by the owners, their

community and local chiefs. To assist the local integration process, UNHCR's senior protection officers worked with NaCSA, the chiefs and local authorities to find a solution to the issue of refugees accessing land within existing legal frameworks. They then sought popular support for implementation.

Across the Kenema region, the response from local communities was overwhelmingly positive. Shortly after the proposal for refugee land ownership was presented to the local community in the chiefdom of Small Bo, representatives formed a delegation to visit the home of Paramount Chief Benya, offering complete support.

“THEY SAID, ‘CHIEF, OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS HAVE ASKED FOR OUR HELP, AND WE MUST HELP THEM’. THEY WANTED NOTHING IN RETURN”

Chief Benya explains.

The result of this process is a series of legal land agreements between local authorities, landowners and refugees which give each integrating refugee the legal right to a plot of land, free of charge, for as long as they and their descendants choose to live in Sierra Leone. The life-changing document gives refugees a sense of belonging, enables them to become full members of their local community, and guarantees a legacy for their children. With support from NaCSA and UNHCR, they have built shelters and farm the land, growing crops to feed their families with and sell, to help contribute to communal funds. Through their success, they bring benefits to the communities that have given them the permanent use of this land, enabling everyone to flourish.



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## Giving back: a little goes a long way

Peter<sup>3</sup> is one of the beneficiaries of this land agreement and has built a new home through the UNHCR shelter scheme on the land he has been given. He is deeply appreciative of 'Uncle Emmanuel', the local landowner who has provided plots for so many former refugees living here. Through this land agreement scheme, Peter feels he has some security. He has created a vegetable garden and a small cassava plantation where he grows produce to feed his new family.

Peter fled to Sierra Leone from Liberia in 2002, after his wife and son were murdered in front of him and his own life was threatened.

<sup>3</sup> This person's name has been changed.

Because of what happened, he feels he can never return to Liberia. Slowly he has been rebuilding his life. He has found love and married again and chose to locally integrate in this village in 2008.

Local integration has given Peter the possibility of creating a new life and to become a valuable member of the community in which he resides and works. On his arrival in Sierra Leone, he studied to be a teacher through a UNHCR training scheme. Today he works four days a week teaching a lively class of 58 infants in the local government-run primary school, which has over 800 pupils, including host community and former refugee children. Teaching is where Peter's heart lies. His face lights up when he describes what teaching means to him:

“ I AM REALLY HAPPY BECAUSE THEY ALL LOVE ME AND I LOVE THEM AND WE HAVE FUN TOGETHER - WE JOKE TOGETHER. I LIKE IT. ”





The school, like many in Sierra Leone, desperately needs qualified teachers, but it currently has little money for this essential work. Like many former refugees, Peter feels that it is important to contribute to the community who took him in, so he works unpaid, but hopes that one day, this will change. This means, however, that he has had to find other ways to support his new family. He has used start-up funding provided by UNHCR to set up a small business buying and selling sugar, palm oil and balls of carboic soap which his wife and sister make. They sell these at the market on Fridays, his day off from teaching. From these various enterprises, they can make enough money to survive and plan a little for the future.

## The importance of development support from the international community

Local integration is a highly successful and mutually beneficial strategy in Sierra Leone. This durable solution is designed to enable former refugees to be self-sustaining and 'fly on their own' as they become citizens or permanent residents of their new home.

This is a fragile phase for the country. Continued support from the international community and development partnerships are vital to enable UNHCR to support communities and refugees in the integration process and to support the Government in this time of transition to peace. This is particularly evident in the areas of education and health.



### Tobanda Clinic, Kenema Region

It is early afternoon and raining heavily at Tobanda Clinic. About 20 people sit quietly waiting to see Josephus Campbell, the Community Health Officer. Originally built by UNHCR during the height of the refugee crisis in Sierra Leone, the clinic was recently handed over to the Government and is now a mainstreamed health care service for refugees, former refugees and Sierra Leoneans, as part of the local integration strategy. It is a large clinic serving over 8,000 local people, with three consultancy rooms, a pharmacy, maternity ward, mother and baby unit, isolation unit, general ward and a vaccination centre. It is completely solar powered, thanks to a UNHCR environmental initiative. As UNHCR completes the planned hand over to the Ministry of Health, running the clinic has become a struggle. The staff are overstretched and the clinic looks threadbare.



“FOR A CLINIC OF THIS SIZE WE NEED A MINIMUM OF SIX EMPLOYEES JUST TO KEEP IT RUNNING. CURRENTLY THERE ARE JUST THREE STAFF WORKING HERE, ONLY TWO OF WHOM ARE PAID.”

Josephus Campbell, Community Health Officer

Josephus is paid, as is a maternity and childhood officer, employed as part of the Government strategy to reduce child mortality. Amare Mustaphe, also a local Sierra Leonean, is the vaccination officer. He has worked at the clinic for the past 12 years, but now he is working for free.

“THIS IS AN IMPORTANT JOB. MY FRIENDS SAY, ‘WHY DO YOU DO IT?’ ALL I CAN SAY IS THAT I HOPE ONE DAY THEY WILL PAY ME AGAIN. IN THE MEANTIME I AM HERE TO HELP.”



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“Sierra Leone is a country still limping out of conflict,” notes James Harding, Programme Manager for NaCSA. “It would be very good to get more support.”

## The future

All stakeholders, from the Government through to local chiefs, see local integration as an important and beneficial strategy in both the country and the region. As a result, it is anchored in national policy legally, socially and culturally and implemented in both rural and urban areas. This is not only because it is seen as the right thing to do for displaced ‘brothers and sisters’. It is not only because the government sees it as its responsibility under international law. And it is not only because it makes economic and social sense and brings clear collective benefits to local communities and to the country. In this region, scarred by violent conflict, people see that security in one country means security in another. Local integration is not only a logical solution for refugees, it is also a tool to enhance future security and stability for all the people of this tightly-knit and interdependent region.

The Government is expanding its health care services for all citizens, and in particular for pregnant women and nursing mothers, as part of a National Recovery and Poverty Reduction Strategy, ‘Agenda for Change’ (2009-2012). But the government requires continued input from international development partners to address the many issues it faces.



# The bigger picture

## regional approaches to local integration

“ YOU CANNOT HAVE SECURITY WITHOUT SOLIDARITY.”

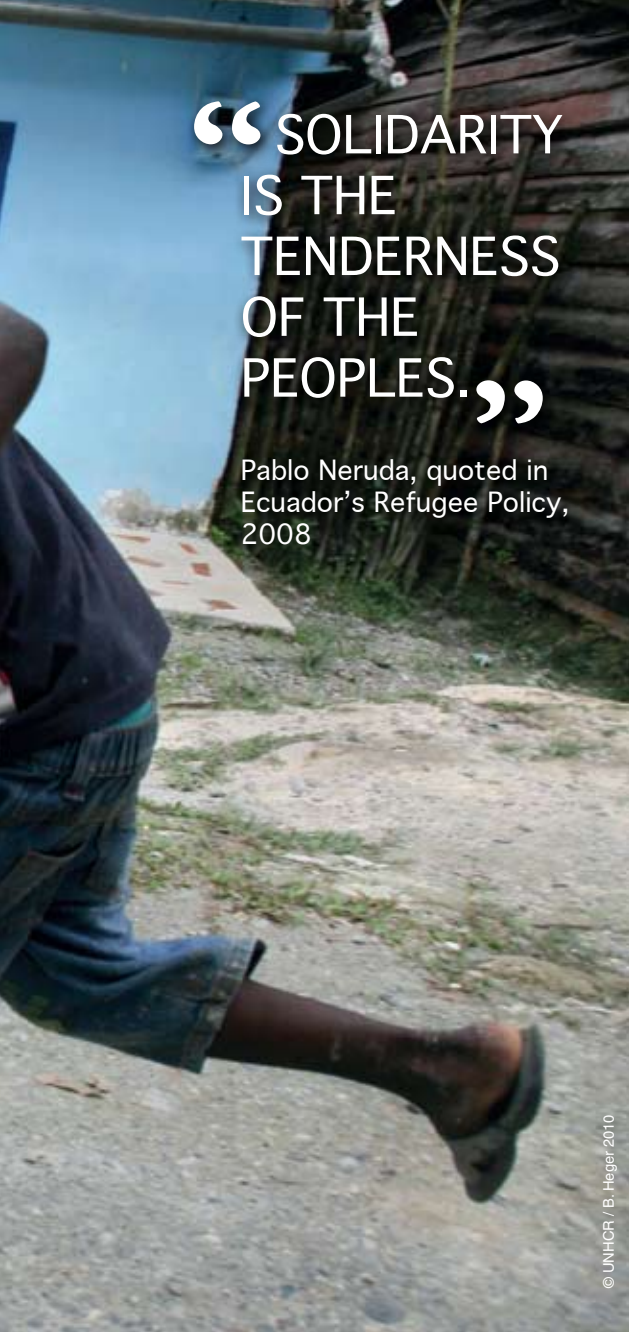
Valentin Tapsoba, UNHCR Representative, Sierra Leone

Pursuing durable solutions through solidarity between countries can help to build greater peace and stability in an increasingly interdependent world. In West Africa and Latin America, innovative integration solutions for refugees have been implemented within regional frameworks to address complex and protracted refugee situations.

## West Africa: ‘With freedom comes security’

In West Africa, local integration represented 50 per cent of UNHCR’s programmes in 2009. In this region local integration is not dependent on national governments granting citizenship to refugees.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Protocols relating to the Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment, provide a legal



“ SOLIDARITY  
IS THE  
TENDERNESS  
OF THE  
PEOPLES.”

Pablo Neruda, quoted in  
Ecuador's Refugee Policy,  
2008

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framework for economic regional integration in West Africa and a basis for intra-regional migration management. It confers upon citizens of ECOWAS member States the right to enter, reside and establish themselves in the territory of any member State. Refugees originating from ECOWAS member States enjoy equal treatment. These protocols therefore offer a unique solution to former Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees, conferring upon them secure legal residence in their host countries. This regional legal framework, combined with domestic legal provisions governing residence and naturalization, offers a range of possibilities for displaced people to claim rights and access durable solutions across the fifteen countries in the region.

In practice, many people displaced by the conflicts in West Africa, most of whom have been staying in their host country for many years, prefer to be able to live, work and rebuild their lives in their country of asylum while keeping their original nationality. In Sierra Leone, for example citizenship is not a priority. Former refugees tend to see themselves as members of the broader ECOWAS community rather than as citizens of their new State. Guarantees under the ECOWAS protocols enable former refugees to establish themselves in their host country when they choose to do so, while allowing them to retain their nationality and all privileges attached.

These opportunities for local integration also release post-conflict countries of origin from having to integrate too many returnees. Moreover, many former refugees who integrate and work in other ECOWAS member States will donate remittances to their home countries, contributing to reconstruction and development efforts.

## Latin America: solidarity in action

Human mobility is central to the Latin American approach to humanitarian protection of and durable solutions for refugees. A tradition of regional solidarity has been shaped by a shared experience of violence and displacement, including dictatorships in the 1970s and civil wars in the 1980s. More recently, two decades of armed conflict in Colombia have resulted in the deaths of over 200,000 people, leaving more than three million displaced internally and across the region.

The presence of millions of displaced people across the region requires innovative and creative approaches to seeking durable solutions. In many cases, the communities in which refugees reside are themselves impoverished and have found providing assistance for new arrivals challenging. This circumstance has highlighted the need for greater responsibility-sharing between countries in the region, and the need for the international community to support processes geared to making such solutions a reality.

In 2004, 20 Latin American countries and over 100 local NGOs adopted a practical and pragmatic humanitarian plan for the region, with the support of UNHCR. The Mexico Plan of Action (MPA) is an operational regional framework with local integration at its core. Seen as a visionary instrument in the field of refugee protection, the MPA exemplifies principles of regional solidarity, international cooperation and burden-sharing.

A core aim within the MPA framework is to achieve integration for refugees by enhancing their self-reliance, reducing their dependency upon host countries and, it is hoped, increasing regional stability. Colombian refugees are concentrated in urban areas across the region and in the sensitive border areas between Colombia and its neighbours. This has led to the creation of two targeted plans for local integration: the Cities of Solidarity and the Borders of Solidarity programmes. In addition, the Solidarity Resettlement programme has been developed to support the strategic resettlement and integration of refugees across the region.

While many examples of good practice in the areas of legal, social and economic rights have been developed since the implementation of the MPA, enormous challenges remain. The success and sustainability of this visionary approach will depend not only upon the ongoing development of coherent MPA-based national



strategies in each country, but also on the levels of international support for the implementation of effective initiatives.

## Cities of Solidarity

More than 2.5 million displaced people in Latin America dwell in urban areas across the region. Many live below the poverty line, unable to make a living. Cities of Solidarity



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specifically aims to ensure that refugees receive services on par with those provided to nationals and to promote one of the MPA's key aims of establishing self-sufficient livelihoods for these people. More than 50 formal and informal Cities of Solidarity agreements have been established across the region to facilitate local integration for refugees, IDPs and asylum seekers by enhancing their self-reliance, reducing their dependency upon host countries and, it is hoped, increasing regional stability.

The municipality of Desamparados in Costa Rica exemplifies

the model that the Cities of Solidarity programme provides for a comprehensive approach to the legal, economic and social integration of urban refugees. Here strong partnerships between local and municipal authorities, civil society, international agencies, refugees and host communities are making a tangible difference to the integration of refugees in all three fields.

**'Casa de Derechos' (House of Rights)**

Maria fled Colombia after her husband was killed. She crossed the border into Costa Rica, where she was recognized as a refugee.

Despite the legal, social and economic rights afforded to refugees in the region, Maria, in common with many other refugees, experienced that finding her way in a new country and feeling a part of society was often a difficult process. Many displaced people find themselves lonely and isolated and without the wherewithal to establish a livelihood. They may also find it difficult to regain their self-esteem and independence.

Desamparados, where Maria now lives - along with an estimated 3,500 other displaced people - is a highly populated, low-income city on the outskirts of San Jose, Costa Rica's capital city. It is also a **City of Solidarity**. One of its most innovative projects is located in what appears to be an ordinary family house, in one of the most poverty-stricken neighbourhoods. The house, known as *Casa de Derechos* (House of Rights), is changing the lives of local people, refugees and migrants - including Maria.

*Casa de Derechos*, a multisectorial endeavour, provides an integrated legal and psychosocial advice service for refugees, migrants and nationals. Today the Casa hosts, among others: the Social Department of the Municipality; a UNHCR project to

address international protection and sexual and gender-based violence issues; a Legal Aid Centre managed by the University of Costa Rica/ National Lawyers Association; a United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) project focusing on youth, employment and migration; a CARITAS-run labour rights project; a microfinance project managed by APRODE; and a computer lab for the clients of the *Casa*. It also hosts educational and cultural events. This has made *Casa de Derechos* a social hub in which divisions between refugees, migrants and locals are soon erased. A new community has been created for local people, all of whom share the same struggle for survival.

Once a nail beautician, Maria struggled to find a way of supporting herself in her new home town but her dream to start a small business remained. Newly informed of her legal right to work and with support from UNHCR's microfinance initiative, she produced a business plan. Once she had demonstrated the skills and ability to set up on her own, Maria was awarded a grant to embark on her dream: not a nail parlour, but a driving school. Maria proudly bought her first car this year, and her new business is up and running. She is now expanding and developing a web page to promote the company.

Maria and other new local entrepreneurs are not just changing their own lives. They provide inspiration to new arrivals at the Casa, who see that it is possible to become independent and to build a new life with support from their new community.

## The Role of Corporate Partnerships in Promoting Local Integration

All countries in the region afford the right to work to refugees and Argentina is one of 7 countries that has extended that right to asylum



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seekers (the other 6 are: Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Paraguay and Peru). Being able to work is, as many displaced people testify, not only about survival. Having a job enables them to become part of the social fabric of the community in which they live. It also changes the perceptions of their host communities, who recognize that they are valuable members of society.

For many, however, getting their first job in their host country is extremely difficult. In Buenos Aires, a new job placement scheme has been created in partnership with leading private companies to help refugees to get their foot in the door. UNHCR has signed agreements with the corporate social responsibility departments of a number of significant food-related and fast-food companies. In October 2010, the first 30 candidates selected under the scheme were sent for job interviews with the companies. The regional office in Argentina and its implementing partners have recently branched out into other sectors like tourism and hospitality.

## Borders of Solidarity

A territorial rather than a population-based approach has been devised for refugees residing in Colombia's borderlands, which makes a coordinated multilateral response easier to organize for those countries involved in the Colombian situation.

Since 2004 UNHCR and its partners have developed over 1,000 community projects in border communities. Eleven bi-national projects have been implemented, including initiatives in the areas of education, health, governance and economic development. Three hundred and fifty income-generation projects have also been created, benefiting more than 6,400 people in the border areas of Panama, Ecuador and Venezuela. These include community microcredit schemes supporting small businesses, which enable refugees to become active participants in their new societies and self-reliant members of their new communities.

*An Indigenous who benefits from a UNHCR microcredit program to plant bananas, loads them on the pirogue to go and sell them in the village of Yaviza, Rio Chico, Darien region*

Local integration along the borders is supported by linking refugee assistance to national and regional development plans.

**Ecuador: making the hidden visible**

Ecuador has the highest number of registered refugees in Latin America, with approximately 135,000<sup>4</sup> people in need of international protection. Some 40 per cent of the refugee population live in rural areas.

In the remote border of Northern Ecuador and Colombia, as a result of ongoing conflict, thousands have been displaced from their lands. People from indigenous tribes, many of whom hold dual nationality, have also been forced to flee their homes, to protect their children from being recruited by guerillas or taken as guides in the jungle. The result is an unknown number of displaced people, living in what are already impoverished villages and rural communities in Northern Ecuador.

According to Deborah Elizondo, UNHCR's representative in Ecuador: "Forty per cent of Colombian refugees stay in the north because all they know is fishing, surviving off the land on a daily basis." The documentation of these 'hidden' refugees and their legal recognition are the first steps towards integration, enabling them to gain access to a range of social and economic rights. It also enables targeted development planning to support host communities in these remote areas.

Between March 2009 and March 2010, an enhanced registration programme was undertaken by the Ecuadorian Government with the support of UNHCR, to document the true nature of displacement in these remote borderland areas. This resulted in the recognition of 27,740 people as refugees and they are now able to work and live legally and, with support, will be able to integrate into their new communities.

<sup>4</sup> As of 31 December 2009.



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Other information amassed from the registration drive will help in planning and designing integration programmes in the region. The exercise also identifies the scale of work needed, enabling development partners to engage and assisting Ecuador in fulfilling its goals.

Development support for local communities assists them in hosting refugees as they integrate. It also helps governments to maintain popular support for local integration as a durable solution, reducing local tensions and host fatigue, which will, in turn, prevent onward displacement.

## Ensuring sustainable futures

Regardless of their individual socio-economic situations, Latin American countries are upholding the spirit of the MPA and providing an open door policy to refugees across the region. Even so, the creation of a visionary legal framework and strategy for durable solutions would be meaningless without coherent national strategy and the means to implement it on the ground.

UNHCR is working in partnership with countries across the region to build national capacities and assist in the development of comprehensive national strategies.

Continued support for such capacity building will ensure that displaced people do not become a marginalized underclass, creating tensions within communities and undermining a tradition of solidarity that has been the hallmark of this region for so many years.

# Conclusions

In each of these examples, UNHCR has played a catalytic role, including providing technical and financial support, ideas, and advice. Initiatives have been developed in collaboration with national and local partners, which suit the particular legal and social context of each country. They have been tailored to work within existing frameworks where possible, rather than creating parallel systems. Wide consultation and the full participation of stakeholders have led to innovative solutions, which in turn, have shaped realistic policy-making. Information sharing and awareness raising have paved the way for the successful implementation of strategies.

Ultimately, as with any successful policy, effective local integration is driven by political will and strong leadership at a regional, national and local level, from those who recognize the value of the approach.

Commitment to international law and an understanding of the importance of solidarity and responsibility-sharing have played a part in the cases we have looked at here. The outcomes underline the value of this approach, as countries have come to see refugees not as problematic non-citizens, but as resourceful individuals and groups who, if nurtured, and allowed to integrate, can flourish and make a valuable contribution to their new home in many different ways.



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# Local integration means....

**A durable solution:** a permanent, peaceful and dignified solution to protracted refugee situations.

**A flexible approach:** many programmes with choices and engagement levels to suit different political and social situations and specific country needs.

**Local leadership:** processes led by the government, with UNHCR and other external support. Governments can effectively manage refugee situations and engage international actors in processes through strategic planning, to enable the best outcome for host communities as well as refugees.

**Burden sharing:** a national or regional approach which engages the support of the international community.

**Development:** allows development actors to engage in community-based support and development to benefit the host country, and enables refugees to be agents of development rather than recipients of aid.

**Skill sharing:** allows refugees, many of whom are well-educated and skilled, to become self-reliant and to contribute to local economies and wider society.

**Peacebuilding:** local integration benefits regional peace and national security, breaking down barriers between refugees and host communities.

**Local integration allows ordinary people displaced by conflict, violence or persecution to find a durable solution to their plight, ending a state of limbo and enabling them to move forward with their lives.**

# Resources for donors and host governments

*Framework for Durable Solutions for Refugees and Persons of Concern*, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (2003)  
<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4124b6a04.html>

*Handbook for Planning and Implementing Development Assistance for Refugees (DAR) Programmes*, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (2005)

*Local Integration and Self-Reliance*, EC/55/SC/CRP.15, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (2 June 2005)  
<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/478b3ce12.html>

*Rights of Refugees in the Context of Integration: Legal Standards and Recommendations*, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (June 2006), POLAS/2006/02 <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/44bb9b684.html>

*Provisional Programme Guide on Coexistence Projects*, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (March 2010)

## Regional Resources

*Mexico Declaration and Plan of Action to Strengthen International Protection of Refugees in Latin America*, 16 November 2004  
<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/424bf6914.html>

*Towards the Local Integration of Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees in West Africa through enhancing self reliance and promoting Regional integration.* Regional Framework, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (2008)  
<http://www.unhcr.org/4a27be466.html>

*Handbook on Integration for Policy-Makers and Practitioners*, European Union: European Commission (November 2004)  
<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4374978b4.html>

## Country-specific resources

*National Strategy For Community Integration Programme (NASCIP) 2010-2014*, Prime Minister's Office, Tanzania (2010)

*Tanzania Local Integration Programme Joint Action Plan, Newly Naturalized Tanzanians 2010-2014*, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (2010)



# Elgudzha's Story: The BelaGeorgia Bakery, Grodno, Belarus

Hot bread topped with melted cheese is being sliced in the production room of a small bakery. Elgudzha Mania, Manager of the BelaGeorgia Bakery and chairperson of the Grodno Public Association of Georgians, offers everyone a piece. It is delicious.

Elgudzha came to Belarus in 1994 at the age of 37 with his wife, three children and elderly mother via a treacherous route across the mountains, to escape from religious persecution in Abkhazia. On his arrival in Belarus, unable to find formal employment, he earned a living at the margins of society – ‘living from pocket to pocket’, as they say in Russian - as he rebuilt his life.

In 2003 the BelaGeorgia bakery was created, named after a toast to the spirit of friendship between the two countries. The bakery was the pilot project in a new social enterprise scheme for refugees, and was

established with the help of a UNHCR start-up grant of US \$31,000. BelaGeorgia's traditional Georgian lavash bread is now sold in shops across the city.

The bakery currently employs 18 people, nine of whom are Belarusian. Its profits are used to run social events which celebrate Georgian culture, but are open to all communities. It also supports Georgian language classes, pays interpreters for those who need them, covers the college fees of a young refugee woman studying medicine, and maintains two vulnerable families. In 2009 alone, the bakery paid \$40,000 in taxes. It is considered by all - the government, UNHCR, Elgudzha, his colleagues and the local community - as a resounding success. Now it is presented as the model for establishing refugee-run community business and support enterprises in Belarus.



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“PEOPLE BUY  
OUR BREAD AND  
TASTE IT AND THEY  
THINK – ‘THIS IS  
GOOD!’ THEN THEY  
SEE THE NAME  
‘BELAGEORGIA’.  
IT MAKES THEM  
THINK. IT CHANGES  
HOW THEY SEE US.”

Gocha Osanidze, Grodno Public  
Association of Georgians



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MARCH 2004.



**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency

UNHCR  
P.O. Box 2500  
1211 Geneva 2  
Switzerland

[www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)

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