United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
(May 2013 – April 2014)

UNHCR’s support to New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) Planning and Coordinating Agency

Operational highlights

In 2012, most of UNHCR’s resources in Africa were commanded by a number of simultaneous, large-scale emergencies. Violence and political turmoil in Mali, ongoing clashes in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states in Sudan, a flare-up of fighting in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and a resurgence of rebel activity in the Central African Republic (CAR) displaced hundreds of thousands of people.

Many countries affected by refugee emergencies, including Burundi, Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mauritania as well as relevant sub-regional and country chapters, for information on the Mauritania operation), Niger, Rwanda, South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda and Zambia, kept their borders open and generously provided refuge to the displaced. Several of these countries recognized the arriving refugees on a *prima facie* basis.

The number of refugees who returned home voluntarily increased, reversing the downward trend of previous years. As a result of the comprehensive durable solutions strategies implemented by UNHCR in Africa, more than 335,000 refugees returned in 2012, compared to some 236,000 in 2011.

Despite the increase in refugee returns, the overall number of people of concern to UNHCR in Africa remained stable at some 12 million. The number of refugees grew slightly, to some 2.7 million in 2012, compared to 2.6 million in 2011, as a result of the emergencies in Mali and eastern areas of the DRC, clashes in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states in Sudan, and the ongoing arrival of Somali refugees in Ethiopia and Kenya. The main refugee-hosting countries in Africa were: Kenya, with nearly 565,000 refugees; Ethiopia, with more than 376,000; and Chad, with some 374,000. They were followed by South Sudan, with more than 202,500 refugees, and Uganda, with nearly 198,000.

The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) who received protection and assistance from UNHCR in Africa declined. This was partly due to the return of some 550,000 IDPs in Côte d’Ivoire, the DRC, Somalia and Sudan, but was also the result of a reduction in funding available for IDP programmes: particularly affected were the DRC and Sudan.

Progress was made in achieving durable solutions for Angolan and Liberian refugees, for whom the cessation of refugee status was invoked on 30 June 2012. Tens of thousands of Angolans and Liberians returned to their areas of origin and local integration options were pursued for many.

On 6 December 2012, the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention) entered into force after it had been ratified by 15 member States. UNHCR has been working with the African Union on a draft model law that will help States bring their national legislation in line with the principles of the Convention.
Working environment

UNHCR’s working environment in Africa was dominated by multiple refugee emergencies. New humanitarian crises in Mali and the eastern DRC captured the media headlines, eclipsing ongoing emergencies in the East and Horn of Africa.

The rapid deterioration of the political situation in Mali and ensuing violence in the north forced tens of thousands of refugees to cross into neighbouring Burkina Faso and Niger; UNHCR had to reinforce its presence in these countries swiftly. The governments and local communities in Burkina Faso and Niger were the first to provide protection and humanitarian aid, in spite of being severely affected by successive droughts in the Sahel. By the end of the year, some 150,000 refugees had fled northern Mali. They initially inhabited spontaneous sites and were later accommodated in refugee camps, where they received basic assistance. As many of the sites were dangerously close to the border or strategic military areas, the refugees had to be moved to safer locations. Some 260,000 people were displaced inside Mali, but many of them remained inaccessible to international aid organizations, particularly in the northern part of the country.

Renewed violence in the eastern DRC sent more than 91,000 refugees into Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda and Zambia. According to OCHA, the number of IDPs in North and South Kivu provinces rose to some 1.8 million people. Other provinces also experienced an increase in IDP numbers, notably Province Orientale and Katanga, due to localized violence among different militias and the armed forces. Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) against civilians continued unabated in the DRC.

Some 193,000 Sudanese fled into Ethiopia and South Sudan from South Kordofan and Blue Nile states in Sudan. Most of these refugees were in very poor condition when they arrived in the remote and underdeveloped areas of South Sudan. Despite enormous challenges, UNHCR and its partners succeeded in improving the precarious public health situation in the refugee camps and providing more potable water to refugees.

In 2012, UNHCR registered the one-millionth Somali refugee in the region (including those who fled to Yemen). Despite this tragic milestone, positive political developments in Somalia have renewed hopes for peace and stability in the country. UNHCR began relocating its Somalia office from Nairobi to Mogadishu, a move that will be completed in the first half of 2013.

All countries in Southern Africa continued to be affected by mixed migration movements, even though preliminary statistics indicate that the number of asylum claims in South Africa went down. Increasingly stringent border controls reduced access to asylum procedures in the entire region.

In addition to comprehensive solutions strategies which were developed for Angolan, Liberian and Rwandan refugees, UNHCR started a multi-year plan to pursue resettlement for some 50,000 refugees from the DRC currently living in sub-Saharan Africa. At the same time, it sought to identify opportunities for local integration or voluntary repatriation for other Congolese refugees. In West Africa, the Office made progress in bringing closure to the situation of Mauritanian refugees in Senegal through voluntary repatriation and local integration.

Achievements and impact

**Promoting access to territorial protection and asylum procedures** was a key protection priority in 2012. While countries neighbouring a number of States in conflict kept their borders open to
hundreds of thousands of arriving refugees, asylum space was reduced for those in mixed migration movements or protracted situations. Activities were undertaken in countries such as Guinea, Liberia and Nigeria to build protection capacity among government officials and other partners, and improve cooperation with border guards and local officials in frontier areas. UNHCR and local authorities registered new arrivals, initially at the household level, and followed up with individual registration, an assessment of special needs and the issuance of refugee identity cards. In South Africa, the main destination country in Africa for mixed migratory movements, UNHCR supported six legal aid clinics that advised more than 16,000 refugees and asylum-seekers.

**Reducing protection risks for people of concern** took many forms in 2012. In Burkina Faso, Niger and South Sudan, refugees were moved away from border areas to ensure their safety. In Chad, the DRC, Ethiopia and Somalia, UNHCR supported livelihood projects to help displaced women and girls become more self-reliant and to reduce their exposure to SGBV. Getting children into schools remained one of the most efficient forms of child protection, as child-friendly spaces and safe school environments reduce the risk of forced recruitment, exploitation and early marriage. UNHCR also facilitated the acquisition of nationality documentation for some 40,000 South Sudanese, reducing statelessness in that country.

**Addressing the basic needs of people of concern** remained one of UNHCR’s top priorities in Africa, both in emergencies and in protracted refugee situations. In Niger, for example, a nutrition survey by UNICEF in August 2012 showed that the global acute malnutrition (GAM) rates in three refugee camps were well above the level of 10 per cent established as the standard measurement in emergency situations. In Mangaize Camp, a GAM rate of 21.2 per cent was recorded. In Abala Camp, the GAM rate was 18.7 per cent, and in Tabareybarey Camp, 15.5 per cent. To address the problem, several programmes, including one that provided blanket wet feeding for all children under 2 years of age, were implemented. Such efforts were successful, despite the continuing inflow of malnourished refugees from Mali, which brought down GAM rates to 6.9 per cent in Mangaize, 11.7 per cent in Abala and 6.6 per cent in Tabareybarey by the end of 2012.

UNHCR worked with local authorities and other partners to immediately provide millions of refugees with life-saving assistance including emergency shelter, basic relief and sanitary items and access to primary health care. Despite efforts to ensure that all refugee children received a primary education, results differed among operations. While almost all refugee children of school age in the refugee camps in Rwanda were registered for primary school, in Burkina Faso only 33 per cent of refugee children were enrolled in primary education. In the refugee camps in Dadaab, Kenya, less than 41 per cent of children signed up for primary school, and of those who did only 26 per cent were girls. In Chad, however, 51 per cent of the refugee children going to primary schools were girls. In the Congo, 83 per cent of refugee children in urban areas were enrolled in primary education.

**Facilitating durable solutions** was another key priority for UNHCR, which led to the return of some 335,000 refugees in Africa. These included some 150,000 Ivorian refugees, almost 20,000 Angolans and more than 29,000 Liberians, as well as some 11,000 Rwandans, more than 35,000 Burundians, and over 71,000 refugees from the DRC.

UNHCR, IOM, WFP and UNICEF also supported the return of nearly 35,000 former Burundian refugees from Tanzania, allowing the authorities to close the Mtabila refugee camp at the end of the year. The fate of more than 162,000 newly naturalized Tanzanians, i.e. former Burundian refugees from the Old Settlements, remained uncertain with the integration process still on hold, leaving these former refugees in legal and socio-economic limbo.
During the year, UNHCR pursued local integration opportunities for more than 10,000 Liberians in West Africa, including some 4,000 in Ghana. Some of the countries which provided asylum to former refugees from Angola agreed to offer an alternative legal status to those who complied with certain criteria. This affected some 51,000 Angolans in the DRC, 10,000 in Zambia, 2,000 in Namibia and some 800 in the Republic of the Congo. In the DRC, 6,500 former Angolan refugees received residence cards valid for two years. In eastern Sudan, the Transitional Solutions Initiative began showing results, with an increase in income levels of up to 55 per cent among poor households, including both refugees and host communities.

Reinforcing UNHCR’s operational response remained an imperative during the year. UNHCR strengthened its regional response capacity in Dakar and its field presence and coordination capacity in Burkina Faso and Niger, greatly improving the protection and assistance provided to the Malian refugees in these countries. UNHCR’s operational capacity was also strengthened inside Mali, in South Sudan (to respond to the Sudanese refugee emergency) and in the countries receiving refugees from the eastern DRC. UNHCR deployed more than 400 additional staff for the Mali, South Sudan and Somalia situations in 2012.

Strengthening partnerships remained a defining feature of UNHCR’s operations in Africa. UNHCR enhanced its working relationships with the African Union, the regional economic communities, the different UN agencies and other international organizations, and NGOs. Longstanding cooperation with the African Union and its member States resulted in the entry into force of the Kampala Convention. UNHCR also helped implement the inter-agency Transformative Agenda in Africa by supporting field validation missions in South Sudan and Chad and complementing the IDP coordination structure for the Mali emergency with one for refugee coordination.

During 2012, UNHCR worked directly with some 250 NGOs, including 60 national ones, as well as many other operational partners, to protect and assist some 9.6 million people of concern in Africa.

Constraints

While the Governments and peoples of Africa have shown exemplary hospitality during the recent refugee emergencies, more restrictive attitudes towards long-staying refugees, as well as refugees and asylum-seekers in secondary movements, gave reason for concern.

In December 2012, the Kenyan authorities issued a directive ending the registration of refugees and asylum-seekers in urban areas and ordering their relocation to the refugee camps in Kakuma and Dadaab. UNHCR expressed serious concern about this move and declared that it would not support any forced relocation of refugees. In January 2013, in response to an application brought by two NGOs working for refugee rights, the Kenyan High Court issued an injunction which temporarily halted the relocation. Though the implementation of the directive was temporarily suspended, it had a number of negative consequences including a notable increase in arbitrary arrests and violence against refugees and asylum-seekers.

In Southern Africa, stricter border-control measures and the application of the first safe country principle have reduced the number of asylum applications, raising concerns that people in need of international protection may not have been given access to territory or asylum procedures.

Insecurity continued to be a main constraint in many operations. In the Dadaab refugee camps in Kenya, services had to be interrupted on several occasions because of attacks which resulted in death and injury among refugees and law enforcement personnel. In the DRC and the Central African Republic, the rise of new rebel alliances and their takeover of strategic regions and cities
seriously hampered the delivery of humanitarian assistance, as access was limited and the security of humanitarian workers could not be guaranteed. In Sudan, security constraints in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states and access restrictions imposed by the Government remained a challenge throughout 2012.

Many displaced people are living in remote, underdeveloped and inhospitable corners of the continent. In South Sudan, due to the inaccessibility and underdeveloped state of the refugee-hosting areas, UNHCR was forced to construct roads, airstrips and other infrastructure.

In Chad, as in other operations, unusually heavy flooding in 2012 destroyed refugee and IDP shelters, as well as community infrastructure. More than 7,000 refugees from the Central African Republic had to be relocated due to flooding. In eastern Chad, the harsh environment prevented UNHCR from meeting minimum standards in the provision of water to Sudanese refugees.

In many operations, including Burkina Faso, Chad, Ethiopia, Kenya, Niger, Somalia and Uganda, the lack of firewood remained a serious constraint. Refugee women and girls had to venture out of the camps in search of firewood for fuel, leaving them vulnerable to sexual assault. This also had negative consequences for the environment and strained relations with local communities over resources.

Financial information

In 2012, UNHCR’s initial budget for operations in Africa stood at USD 1.6 billion. The emergencies in the DRC, Mali and Sudan increased the requirements in the region to USD 1.96 million, which were presented in different supplementary appeals. Despite generous donor support, the needs remained greater than the means available to address them. Expenditure in Africa in 2012 stood at USD 961 million, covering 49 per cent of the total needs, compared to USD 857.7 million in 2011 and USD 675 million in 2010.

The bulk of the financial resources had to be allocated to life-saving activities. In South Sudan, the absence of passable roads in the May-to-November rainy season forced UNHCR to airlift some 653 tonnes of relief items at considerable cost. Where security was poor, as in Burkina Faso, north-eastern Kenya, Niger and Somalia, the delivery of protection and assistance entailed sizeable expenses related to security escorts and other safety measures.

While life-saving assistance was given priority, investments in other areas had to be put on hold. For instance, only limited investment could be made in education. The financial requirements to combat SGBV increased 140 per cent from 2010 to 2012, but less than 31 per cent of the needs could be addressed due to lack of funding.

Resources devoted to Africa

2012 Budgeted expenditure UNHCR US$ 2,357,710,000, including US$ 960,976,000 for Africa Programmes.

12013 Budgeted expenditure UNHCR 2,600,962,000, including USD 898,336,000 for programmes in Africa.

1*Kindly note that the 2013 figures are preliminary as some operations in Africa needed an extension of their liquidation period due to the late arrival of contributions. Final expenditures may alter slightly