

Appeal for financial support for the Liberia Reintegration Program

After the end of fourteen years of civil conflict, the Liberian Government through the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC) has collaborated with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other partners in seeking a durable solution for the voluntary repatriation of Liberian refugees.

The UNHCR organized voluntary repatriation program officially began in October 2004 and ended on June 30, 2007. Movement continued up to December 31, 2007 for persons registered but not repatriated before the 30 June official deadline. As of December 31, 2007, there still remained a registered residual caseload of 75,509 Liberian refugees in countries in the West African sub-region. The Republic of Guinea, Côte D'Ivoire, Sierra Leone and Ghana account for approximately 92% of the residual Liberian refugee caseload.

At the onset of the repatriation process in 2004, UNHCR established reintegration program to empower returnees. These programs included skills training (e.g. driver's education, baking, sewing, hair dressing, soap making, tailoring, interior and exterior design, computer literacy, tie and dye, etc). In addition, UNHCR, through its implementing partners, constructed shelters for vulnerable returnees and former Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in selected counties, such as Bomi, Lofa, Grand Cape Mount and Bong. Micro loan and grant schemes also formed part of the program. Between 2006 and 2007, UNHCR funded a US\$30,000 Grant Scheme for returnees. Grants ranged from US\$100 to US\$500 for qualified candidates. The Grant Committee included LRRRC, ZOA Refugee Care and UNHCR. Unfortunately, as UNHCR's country operations for Liberia phases out, these programs have also ended. Still, the needs are great.

As of September 16, 2008, a total of 7,564 Liberian refugees have been assisted to return since the resumption of the accelerated voluntary repatriation on 13 April 2008. Of this total number, 7,100 returned from Ghana, 170 from Guinea, 70 from Sierra Leone, 216 from Nigeria and 8 from the Gambia.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs and LRRRC have devised a Liberia Reintegration Program. The goals of a national reintegration program are to ensure that vulnerable returnees are provided adequate support to become productive members of society and other returnees are provided opportunities to contribute to national development and economic growth through rapid development projects and partnerships with host communities. The efforts are fully consistent with Government's decentralization plan and the local development objectives articulated in chapter 8 of the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS).

The following constitute areas in need of urgent assistance to support the Liberia Reintegration Program:

1. **Non-food Items (NFIs) for Returnees** – Even though UNHCR provides non-food items (cooking utensils, mats, etc) to returnees at the LRRRC managed Transit/Reception Center in Schefflin, Margibi County, there is an urgent need to assist in providing mattresses and other supplementary items. The cost of each 3”X6”X4” (Width X Length X Thickness) foam mattress is US\$26 (Twenty Six United States Dollars).
2. **Shelter Program for Returnees** – LRRRC hopes to support the construction of 100 shelters for extremely vulnerable returnees. Vulnerability criteria include single mothers, unaccompanied minors, the disabled, the elderly, and widows. The proposed cost of the entire program is nearly US\$800,000 for skills training in construction and agriculture livelihoods training for beneficiaries, the cost of materials and labor.
3. **Agriculture** – This assistance is aimed at empowering returnees and host communities engage in agricultural activities to meet of their subsistence needs and improve household income. The overall cost value is US\$400,000 (Four Hundred Thousand United States Dollars) yearly. The program includes training, seeds and tools. The training aspect targets 500 individuals at US\$300 per person; while the seeds and tools segment targets 500 individuals at US\$500. This program is essential for sustainable livelihoods of the returnees, community members, as well as, the growth of the communities.

4. **Skills Training Program** –This program is intended to link returnees with skills training institutions to enable them to acquire basic skills. LRRRC would like to raise US\$90,000 (Ninety Thousand United States Dollars) to sponsor returnees. The cost of each skills training program per family is US\$300. Each program includes a starter kit to enable returnees who complete the program to apply their skills by starting small businesses.
5. **Returnees Employment Referral Services Program** – This program is established at LRRRC to link returnees with employment opportunities. It was established with the objective of not only preparing Liberian returnees for the initial re-entry into the Liberian labor market but also assist them to remain in the labor force and be promoted to better jobs to ensure higher financial stability. LRRRC is in need of a computer to support this initiative. The cost of the computer is US\$1,000 (One Thousand United States Dollars).
6. **Cash Grant Scheme** – The purpose of this program is to give grants to returnees to establish small and medium size businesses. Cash grants ranging from US\$100 to \$500, relative to the type of business and support needed. LRRRC is soliciting US\$100,000 (One Hundred Thousand United States Dollars) in assistance to fund the project and empower returnees.

In order to support a component of the Liberia Reintegration Program, please contact LRRRC at lrrrc04@yahoo.com.