4. Management of Guatemala operation and administrative issues
***a. 1. Staffing, structure and co-ordination* and inter-office relations**

- Staffing:

The Guatemalan operation benefited greatly from initiating with a combination of persons already familiar with Guatemala (but not necessarily with UNHCR) and UNHCR staff who were familiar with other Central American repatriation operations. Once the operation was established, the influx of colleagues with repatriation experiences in other continents was equally enriching.
Continuity was also very important to an operation where in-depth understanding of local conflicts and personal relationships with counterparts and returnees enabled UNHCR to be effective. A three-year Standard Assignment Length (SAL) was therefore appropriate. Use of UNV and, in some cases, seconded staff with little or no limitations on renewals allowed the programme to build up expertise in certain areas This compensated for the situations where regular staff or JPO's were rotated after one or two years. In several cases the UNHCR rotation system left important posts uncovered for months and where overlap occurred it was generally insufficient.
It is telling that a significant number of field staff tried to prolong their presence as long as possible even given isolation and other discomforts. The vast majority of staff developed a personal commitment to the operation: "Great efforts have been carried out by a[n]...exceptionally qualified, dedicated and hard-working UNHCR staff in Guatemala..."
In many cases, OCM briefings were insufficient for new staff (especially international field staff). Given the length of the operation, the office was weak in producing and updating regular briefing materials and no uniform induction process was followed. Periodic briefings on important and basic topics could have been carried out for all staff (local and international) to orient newcomers and reinforce identification with UNHCR's mission. Debriefings for outgoing staff were not undertaken on a systematic basis and in some cases, the office might have thus overlooked important information, especially in regard to improving field office operations.
Proper debriefing of staff, UNVs and consultants was also seen as weak. Some staff members had the opportunity to spend some days in Geneva after completion of their assignment and found a lack of interest and preparation for debriefings.
Lack of flexibility in relocating field staff and field offices hampered operations as field office set-up or relocation lagged behind needs in the changing scenario of return movements. Because professional staff were not easily relocated due to contract obligations and corresponding high costs, the mobility of UNV and seconded staff was important.

- Co-Co-ordination and interoffice relations: UNHCR central office (OCM) and field offices (FO)

The forging of a team dynamic through sufficient contact with other colleagues was crucial. Where colleagues were physically isolated, never visited other regions and visits by Guatemala City staff were limited, their morale was predictably low. Attempts to rotate the field-based staff members who periodically participated in monthly meetings at the OCM were useful in this regard.
The lack of consistency in the operations management (which changed from person to person) and management's lack of clear division of responsibilities at OCM resulted in ineffective attention paid to problems brought to the attention of OCM by the field offices. In addition, the OCM had to focus on the sometimes bureaucratic tasks required by UNHCR Headquarters (at the cost of increased attention to the field offices and returnees) which field staff did not fully understand nor were they sympathetic about the time this took from addressing field-related priorities.
Often, only visits to the field regions (the more extended and extensive the better) prompted the central office to resolve the field offices' pending problems. Written memos did not effectively transmit the urgency of issues requiring OCM attention. Given the relevance of field visits by OCM staff, these were insufficient in number
Training activities for staff were sporadic. Training on many practical issues facing staff was not undertaken, when it would have been helpful, due to for lack of time or resources. On the other hand, some training was carried out for the sake of complying with an allocated budget, not necessarily based on priority needs. Perception of junior and/or field office staff (reflected in the questionnaires carried out for this study) was that the considerable sums of money used on regional training programmed from UNHCR Headquarters, mostly for senior staff, was not

consonant with the pressing needs and budget cutbacks experienced at the local level. No relevant training on repatriation and reintegration aspects was carried out.
As has occurred in other UNHCR operations, some local staff (mostly those based in the OCM and noting important exceptions) had difficulty understanding the nature of the work of UNHCR and were not always familiar with the mandate and 'clients' of the organisation. When Guatemalan staff from the capital (mostly in support and/or administrative roles) participated in field operations, they gained increased sensitivity to the realities of the countryside. This served both to stimulate effective support for field offices as well as to help bridge the gap of understanding by many urban dwellers of their rural co-nationals. Another positive result of such visits was to give capital-based staff more credibility and authority when representing UNHCR in front of other actors.
A related problem (for both local and international staff) was an apparent lack of common vision and relatedness between the various "units" created for administrative purposes (programme, protection, administration, etc.). Rigid perceptions about what tasks belonged to each unit sometimes prevented joint efforts or, at the least, a joint vision about approaching the larger tasks at hand.

- Co-ordination and inter-office relations· regional structure

OCM Guatemala was under the purview of the regional office in Costa Rica until 1997 when coverage was transferred to the regional office in Mexico. First, structural dependence of the Guatemalan office on Mexico had been avoided since Mexico was the host to Guatemalan refugees but after the peace agreements were finalised in late 1996, no political tension existed on this account. In any case, the two offices had maintained a high degree of communication and policy co-ordination since the OCM was initiated in 1987 although the two offices were independent.
A positive relationship between Mexico and Guatemala offices grew out of direct contact between staff. More interchange between field office staff in both countries would have given UNHCR- Mexico increased credibility in its role of providing information to refugees and would have sensitised staff as to the logistical and other difficulties within Guatemala while UNHCR Guatemala would have benefited from direct experience with the refugee camps in planning and aiding new returnee settlements. An example of this is the fact that the sub-office in Mexico (Chiapas) with most contact and exchange with Guatemalan field offices was the one at which developed the most positive and harmonious working relationship on a consistent basis with counterparts in Guatemala.

- Co-ordination and inter-office relations: OCM/UNHCR Headquarters and UNHCR global policies' effect on local operations

Financial planning (UNHCR Headquarters and OCM) did not adequately take into account or compensate for the irregular rhythm of return. For sSome years donor generosity exceeded the rhythm of returns and later, when returns continued at a slow but steady pace beyond the period originally foreseen, sufficient funding was no longer available. These ups and downs of returnee movements were not fully anticipated and there was a lack of administrative mechanisms to reserve resources for funding shortfalls which subsequently affected program delivery. The QIP programme, as an example, was forced to cut projects during the two most significant years of funding shortfalls, 1995 and 1998, although there were important numbers of returnees both these years.
The Quick Impact Project (QIP) programme, as mentioned before, also suffered from lack of predictability of future funding in other ways. Since real ongoing projects responding to returnee needs almost never coincided with UNHCR's fiscal year, the agency administering the QIP programme could not formally commit funds to complete projects until the new year was underway. In general, the lack of an administrative mechanism to allow multi-annual planning and multi-annual commitments was detrimental to the programme The QIP programme was forced to cut projects during the two most significant years of funding shortfalls, 1995 and 1998 although there were important number of returnees both these years.
The dependence of the operation in Guatemala (and some activities in Mexico) on special funds instead of annual programme funds raises important issues for other returnee programmes. On the one hand, consistent donor interest and earmarked funds permitted an ample programme in

Guatemala even during years of marked financial crises in the UN and subsequently for UNHCR's annual programme. Nevertheless, when 'donor fatigue' (in part because the same donors were contributing to other aspects of Guatemala's post-conflict situation) set in before the last collective returns had even occurred, there was no agile mechanism for UNHCR as an institution to cover the gap.
In relation to reporting, UNHCR Headquarters frequently requested information from the OCM despite having the pertinent materials in hand. Special requests for new compilations of material were frequently at the last minute, interrupting planning and organisation of OCM The pressure to satisfy UNHCR Headquarters was detrimental to the prioritisation of solutions for refugee/returnee problems. Meeting such deadlines and in general putting one's superiors/colleagues in Geneva first (where future employment opportunities are determined) is therefore pitted against investing time and effort in field operations.
Complex for both UNHCR Headquarters and UNHCR- Guatemala, were funding and reporting requirements by each donor. Different fiscal years, lengthy approval periods and the frequent impossibility to apply retroactive charges for activities undertaken while approval was tacitly accepted but formally pending were particularly problematic issues. For UNHCR as a whole, the inability to streamline these procedures absorbs considerable time and resources.
Lessons learned: staffing, structure and co-ordination, inter-office relations, and selected structural issues

- Initial recruitment of staff in a new operation should give priority to including persons familiar with the country (and countryside) and particular situation of refugees/returnees.
- The benefits of consistent and direct contact between central office staff and field operations and the interchange between field offices both have multiple benefits ultimately aiding in maintaining client-oriented priorities at a policy level (and concerns such as staff safety) and promoting uniform practises and mutual learning country-wide. This applies to both senior staff involved in policy making and support staff whose commitment to responding rapidly to field office needs is crucial.
- Interchange where appropriate between staff on opposite sides of a border sharing a repatriation operation is a necessary investment leading to increased co-ordination between operations and improved understanding of the population involved.
- At the beginning of an operation and according to subsequent staff turnover, basic briefing on protection issues, programme and administrative policies and regulations should be given to all staff (including secretarial staff and drivers).
- Staff training should be organised in relation to the two basic functions: aid in doing one's current job better and staff development for an eventual change in posts. In times of work overload and/or financial shortfalls, the first was deemed more urgent by staff interviewed. The timing of staff development, on the other hand, should not be perceived to come at the cost of ongoing and urgent work with refugees, especially where the perception (or reality) is that there is an imbalance betweenin those who benefit repeatedly from training opportunities and those (generally in field positions or lower-grade posts) who are excluded.
- Administrative mechanisms are necessary to facilitate a programme's' ability to "save for a rainy day" in order to compensate those moments of great need and less funds, with the periods when fund-raising exceeds the demand of the moment At the same time, more fluidity is needed between programmes covered by annual programme funds and those under special programmes to guarantee, in either direction, that resources are found. In any case, mid- to long-term as well as contingency planning is required.

b. Structural response and staff commitment to gGender mainstreaming
A few basic generalisations will be made about the experience of gender mainstreaming in the Guatemalan operation. The following discussion is an attempt to separate the complex process of internalising gender-sensitivity in all internal and external facets of UNHCR as an institution from UNHCR activities with women refugees/returnees and in introducing gender focus in examples of protection and programme work (described previously in this document). An overall assessment is that the 12 years during which the Guatemalan operation existed was a period of rapid evolution for the institution as a whole in relation to gender issues and UNHCR-Guatemala is an interesting case study about what did and did not change during that time.

In the office's increasing capability over the years to identify and address gender issues, corresponding UNHCR guidelines and pressure were influential as were different individuals with particular expertise and/or sensitivity to the issues involved. Given that implementing gender guidelines depends to some extent on a personal understanding and commitment to gender equity, the gender mainstreaming process must take into account the transformation of staff understanding as well as provide the tools to make it happen. In the case of UNHCR-Guatemala, less emphasis was given to staff training (beyond a handful of focal points), nevertheless, changes in day- to- day practises and the positive examples set by some individuals did create a new environment, more conducive to increasing gender mainstreaming. Although specific activities undertaken to implement gender policy with refugees and returnees are discussed elsewhere, an example is included here as a way of illustrating how programmatic decisions can have a synergy effect on gender mainstreaming for an operation as a whole. The decision by the programme unit in January 1993 that UNHCR would involve both men and women of each family in receiving the assistance directly given out by UNHCR had a multiplier effect both within the refugee community and among the UNHCR staff involved.
In this case, a simple administrative action had positive repercussions on field staff in particular. Once women were called upon to receive their assistance, staff had to organise lists of names and receipts accordingly making women returnees visible from an administrative point of view. On the other hand, the fact that staff were thus made to directly speak to the family as a family and not just the male head of household, made the women literally more visible. They had a brief opportunity to mention directly to UNHCR staff their particular concerns and were accorded due respect in front of their families. In this example, UNHCR- Guatemala initiated certain changes before specifically required to do so by UNHCR Headquarters or as part as an explicit gender mainstreaming policy and these new procedures quickly became the normal standard for the staff involved.
Around other profound issues of gender mainstreaming (such as involving women in political and logistical negotiations and planning, improved gender equity in projects, and carrying out capacity building on the topic with project partners), UNHCR often fell short of its (admittedly ambitious) goals when seen retroactively. Most energy was directed at supporting refugee women with short-gap measures as opposed to tackling more complex and integral facets of gender-equity.
Even focussing on the concrete obstacles faced by women returnees, the limitations faced by UNHCR- Guatemala were significant and can be attributed to two main factors. On the one hand, the setbacks that organised refugee women would face upon returning were not anticipated, let alone efforts made to prevent them. As described in the preceding chapter, women were isolated, dispersed from one another and wrapped-up in the task of daily survival given the adverse emergency-type economic situation faced by returnee communities.
On the other hand, the efforts made to address key issues facing women returnees were mostly handled through gender-focus experts and/or consultants and these efforts did not always take root. In some cases, outside consultants turned in reports and recommendations that were not taken into account at a policy level. In another case, staff in a non-supervisory role but essentially in charge of 'policing' colleagues as to their compliance with gender guidelines, a clash of personal workstyles created antagonism instead of willing collaboration.
While the individual attitudes of those resistant to gender-equity policies were never completely overcome (jokes belittling the policy and/or declaring that the fact that females were present constituted "gender focus" were still frequent), dialogue within the office had been initiated and the stakes of being perceived as "anti-gender focus" (let alone tolerant of discrimination against women) were higher. Also, the positive evolution of both policy and practice over the many years of the offices existence is clear: whether due to institutional policy, individual initiatives or a mixture, UNHCR- Guatemala, in the context of the emphasis given on a regional level, helped change attitudes and practices towards women returnees as well as prompting a better understanding of a gender-equity perspective
This last point is best illustrated in regard to UNHCR's image as viewed by external actors. The perception that UNHCR was "serious" about its concerns of gender-sensitive programming came when staff in management and/or visible positions began to insist in the organisational discourse in varied circumstances (not just in activities ostensibly relating to women) outside the organisation. UNHCR's insistence in bringing up these issues repeatedly, often in the words of men in positions of importance, is deemed to have had a positive impact in sensitising implementing partners, government officials and male returnee leaders. Other institutions often sought out UNHCR's knowledge or advice on gender issues and saw UNHCR as a pioneer in

putting gender guidelines into practice Returnee women, in particular, felt continually supported and validated in their endeavours because of UNHCR's public and ongoing commitment.
Lessons learned: gender mainstreaming

- Adequate attention should be paid to training counterpart organisations and implementing partners early on. In addition, the example set by UNHCR personnel in their personal attitudes and institutional practises (showing that gender sensitive planning and implementation is possible) is equally important vis-à-vis outside actors.
- In this sense, recruitment of UNHCR staff could highlight the need for sensitivity and openness to the topic in addition to other overall humanitarian values appropriate to UNHCR's work.
- The simple act of handing over family assistance with both men and women present is effective in both symbolic and practical terms. The fact that registration and forms must respond to the reality of women's presence is also helpful in making women "visible" for UNHCR staff and others.
- The use of staff designated as focal points for making others in the organisation comply with UNHCR gender policy is limited if the staff members in question are isolated and/or marginalised from what the office considers its "normal" activities.
- It is not fair to expect those working on policy issues and implementation, if not in a supervisory role, to enforce compliance of colleagues without explicit support and backing at the supervisory level The incorporation of standard objectives for each staff members through the CMS system in regard to implementation of gender policy is therefore significant in this regard.
- If the implementation of gender policy is not reflected in adequate funding allocations, it is difficult to expect that it will be implemented correctly (for example, special training for counterparts or development of culturally appropriate methodologies may be necessary).
- Gender mainstreaming got a late start in UNHCR-Guatemala and was not addressed in a comprehensive way although there was cumulative sensitivity to relevant issues by the end of the operation and an overall positive effect resulted. In the early years, the use of outside consultants or gender-focus focal points, while generating positive recommendations, tended to "ghettoise" gender and women's issues. Discomfort or resentment with the topic was reflected in jokes and other signs of uneasiness. An integrated approach where all staff feels involved in the process as a positive challenge is an ultimate goal without necessarily removing the need for gender experts or focal points.
- Another aspect of the evolution of the discussion within UNHCR is the fact that the topic of masculinity was virtually ignored as an important aspect. In retrospect, related discussion both among UNHCR staff as well as with partners and beneficiaries would have contributed to a more holistic vision of gender topics and possibly would have broken down the common misperception that gender policy is merely an agenda by which women put men on the defensive
- The fact that senior positions within the Guatemalan operation (P-4 and above) were never held by women, paralleling the tendency for UNHCR as whole, was a symbolic limitation for the goals that UNHCR was advocating outside the organisation.

c. Phase- out strategy

Funding shortages in 1997 prompted a comprehensive phase-out strategy. The development of minimum indicators for returnees' installation in their communities from an earlier stage would have focused efforts when funding was available. As it happened, plans for a gradual and responsible phase-out were truncated by funding shortages and in some areas (geographical and programmatic), UNHCR's withdrawal was somewhat abrupt.
UNHCR Headquarters determined that UNHCR- Guatemala should completely withdraw by December 1999 although aspects of government application of the refugee convention were still under discussion, a new migration law had been passed, the last collective return movements were scheduled forin the last four months of 1998 and other repatriates were still arriving through a formal programme through mid-yearduring mid-1999 Other operations in Central America had retained a minimal presence (normally with a liaison officer) for up to seven years after the last significant repatriation movement and it had been presumed that at least a skeletal

structure could be maintained through the year 2000 in Guatemala. In mid 1999, the possibility of establishing a minimal presence was re-opened during a visit by the High Commissioner to the region.
Despite the constant repetition to returnees that UNHCR's presence would be short-lived for the population once it had returned in Guatemala, some communities or partner institutions were not prepared for UNHCR's withdrawal from rural areas. In other communities, however, the announcement was received with realism and it is possible that UNHCR's sudden absence stimulated the returnees to make new contacts in a more active way
In the case of UNHCR staff, despite clear communication to staff as to the planned scaling-back of posts over different years and the resulting contraction of the field office structure etc , with notable exceptions some work units and/or field offices were not prepared to phase down until closure was imminent. Specific observations are included in the summary that follows.
Lessons learned: phase-down

- Ideally, phase-down in a context where not all returnees have received the minimal attention by UNHCR, must be contemplated as a gradual process although this implies a more drawn-out funding commitment.
- The minimum time needed to implement field office closure is six months. Even with some preparation, the period previous to the closure of an office provokes tremendous work overload, strain and low morale amongto staff undertaking this endeavour.
- Activities should be downgraded at the same time as staff reduction is carried out. On the contrary, Office office staff supposedly in the midst of a phasing-down process to the contrary were given additional responsibilities to those already being handled, adding to stress and inability to meet deadlines.
- The waiting period for termination payments (indemnity, annual leave) is excessive. In some cases staff members have waited more than 4 months to receive their payment. It is recommended that authorisation be sought from UNHCR Headquarters in order to advance 80 percent of the termination payment on the date the staff members is separatedmembers' employment terminates. It is important to prepare exit medical examinations as soon as possible in order to accelerate medical clearance which will expedite termination payments.
- It is impossible to close the official bank accounts coinciding with office closure dates.: Ffor country office closure: accounts ideally should be closed three months before the office actually closes. The process ofto delegatinge financial responsibilities to UNDP should begin with Treasury with as much anticipation as possible, preferably 3 months.
- By the time an office is closing, the amount of files to review and purge may be overwhelming. Reviewing the guidelines and carrying out file purging on a regular basis may be helpful. A person in each unit should be appointed the focal point and should be in charge of keeping their unit "clean" of unnecessary files. In the experience of Guatemala, however, the maxim of automatically purging the oldest files would have been detrimental to the historical vision needed in certain cases, mostly protection-related. On the other hand, an efficient central filing system that could have eliminated the multiple parallel files would have significantly reduced accumulated paper
- There is no institutional system for capturing the larger picture/summary of an office (a narrative account). The information is fragmented in a variety of files. But when historical data is necessary, it involves going through boxes of old files. It would be useful to hire temporary assistance (perhaps an ex-staff member) before an office closes to pull together a narrative summary of UNHCR/government/implementing partner activities that could give a historical narration of the complete history of the office.
- A positive step by OCM was to prepare the UN standardised application forms (P11) sfor all local staff and circulate them to all UN agencies and other projects to support their future job searches. Nevertheless staff for the most part were not taken on by other UN agencies despite UN reform initiatives to that effect at the national level.

d. Other administrationive and telecommunications

Ffile and financial management: systems and training

Lack of proper administrative instructions for the establishment of field offices led to difficulties with management of funds and other administrative matters. For example:
The field office staff was required to manage large sums of money without training for non-career UNHCR staff, nor proper tools (UNHCR's FOAS/FOBS accounting and budgeting software). Authorisation for bank accounts was only given after the scale of operations had wound down in 1998.
The lack of institutional flexibility restricting use of field office bank accounts seriously hindered field operations. Often staff werewas put at risk by transporting large amounts of cash and/or excessive amounts were spent on transfer via security companies. The rigidity of UNHCR rules in regards to bank accounts signals a major contradiction since the same staff prohibited from handling bank accounts had a great deal of responsibility in other areas.
The record management system was never disseminated properly to field offices and each one developed its own system and habits which were hard to overcome.
Changes in instructions on non-expendable property (NEP) management, lack of clear and specific instructions and definition of framework for disposal and adequate software for inventories made proper management of property difficult. UNHCR's asset management software system (MINDER), for example, always created problems for OCM The office invested vast amounts of time in recording assets in MINDER but, as the 1998 inspection mission pointed out, these had never been utilised at UNHCR Headquarters. Also, incompatible versions of MINDER system did not permit updating, human errors were not always detected, and it was not possible to correct system errors locally Furthermore, no clear instructions in regard to items bought under the project budget were available.
The problem of delays in UNHCR Headquarters' decisions regarding asset disposal (utilising the GS.45 form) has been greatly diminished with the recent implementation of the Regional Asset Management Boards. It is recommended that GS.45s be prepared with as much anticipation as possible in order to avoid last minute problems with the sale/donation/write-off of NEP equipment.
Use of re-deployed vehicles and equipment from neighbouring operations in Central America was not cost-effective in the long run and put staff at risk.

- telecommunications and related equipment

The field offices never had reliable communications systems. At first problems were due to poor quality equipment inherited from other offices in the region. Equipment broke down frequently and was repaired by a national staff member trained for that purpose. Later, funding was available for better equipment but this equipment was not deployed in a timely manner to the field offices where it was most needed. Weakness in the supervision of the Telecoms unit aggravated the perception that the unit was not sufficiently responsive to field office requirements. Also, the government withdrew authorisation of frequencies in use (although one frequency continued to be used with full knowledge of authorities) and no adequate alternative was put in place until the field offices were closing. In summary, the field staff in isolated and/or insecure regions wereas frequently at risk with no or with unreliable communication equipment.
Use of walkie-talkies (for visits to communities inaccessible by road) was dependent on borrowing equipment from UNHCR's national counterpart (CEAR) or MINUGUA which was often not possible.
Updated computer equipment and software (for OCM) lagged behind that of other UNHCR offices (especially before 1996). There was no uniform policy as to what equipment was given to each field office nor was there pertinent training of local field staff. In general, the field offices did not have modern computers, good radios nor, telephone systems (where phone lines existed) until the very last stage of the operation.
Policies relating to installation and access to radio communication were determined by adherence to UNHCR Headquarters' guidelines perceived as inflexible instead of being guided by protection concerns. Consequently, UNHCR staff, let alone returnee populations, were frequently in high risk situations with unreliable communications equipment or none at all.
Lessons learned: administration and telecommunications

- Old and/or unreliable communications equipment is not suitable for an operation with potential security risk for staff members. Any telecommunications strategy must be based on knowledge and understanding of field conditions.

- In many cases, vehicles inherited from other UNHCR operations were, in the long run, more costly to maintain than the purchase of new vehicles.
- More administrative flexibility is needed in order for field offices to have bank accounts and/or financial management systems and training where significant amounts of money are managed.
- Frequent changes to some management systems (NEP, for example) means that in a long-term operation will devote undue time to changing over from one system to another.

5. Some conclusions

Every repatriation operation is unique and the range of actors involved and to what extent also varies considerably. Nevertheless, the programme dedicated to refugee return in Guatemala deviated considerably from UNHCR's standard operations in a country of origin not the least because of the time and effort that UNHCR invested relative to the number of refugees. Another important factor was the political role played by the refugees in relation to the overall peace process in Guatemala, also disproportionate to their numbers. Here follows six characteristics that marked UNHCR's programme in Guatemala, valuable for the positive lessons they left UNHCR for possible application elsewhere.

A high level of **refugee participation** shaped both the nature of the repatriation and the variety of actors who became involved. Refugee visibility and organisation also helped stimulate donor-interest in funding the programme. The fact that UNHCR chose to support the participation of organised refugees reflected in the best sense UNHCR's conviction to facilitate repatriation in order to permit refugees to participate in post-war reconstruction. The Guatemalan refugees not only arrived home in time to take part in the reconstruction period, their very negotiation to return helped shape a broader peace process. There is no question that the quadri-partite model, used for many aspects of the return operation, sometimes prolonged the process but there is also little doubt that it prompted more refugees to opt for return and increased chances that the final outcome for any particular refugee group would be more durable. This also contributed to more active participation of the refugees once returned in the implementation of the reintegration activities.

Significant efforts and resources were put into **working directly with refugee and returnee women**. Following the model established by UNHCR Mexico (which in turn had benefited from the experience of NGOs and the fact that women's organisations were forming independent of UNHCR), the Guatemalan operation followed suit. Although not uniform by any measure, there are significant examples of how contact with returnee women changed UNHCR policy and practice as well as heightening the opinions that UNHCR staff held about what was possible in striving for gender equity. While the ultimate evaluation of UNHCR's efforts in this area points to how efforts in Guatemala fell short, and especially when seen in contrast to expectations raised in exile, there is no doubt that the returnee women view UNHCR as an unmistakable ally that helped give them credibility. Furthermore, many other actors and institutions saw UNHCR as a leader in fomenting women's participation in recommendation and in practise.

From mediation to operations, the Guatemalan programme was marked by extensive **inter-institutional co-ordination**. UNHCR was not isolated as an institution and was actively involved in a variety of different forums key to deciding and improving the future of the returnees. Much of this co-ordination prompted informal and mutual capacity-building. In addition, there was exemplary co-ordination between the Mexican and Guatemalan offices and field staff that aided decision-making on the field level and the information given to refugees.

A programme to promote refugees' recovery of **personal documentation or identity papers** expanded upon UNHCR's earlier work in Central America and proved important to returnee protection and exercise of basic rights. The programme provided a model for other entities documenting Guatemalans who were not returnees and gleaned valuable experience that was incorporated into laws revising documentation procedures.

Strategies to promote **long-term reintegration** were an inadvertent result of the unexpectedly drawn-out UNHCR presence in Guatemala. The relative security of multi-year planning at the height of the operation meant that more ambitious activities could be undertaken in areas including land tenure, women's participation in community structures, legislation, medium-term productive projects, and promotion of development agencies involvement in returnee communities.

Despite the co-ordination efforts, UNHCR could have played a more active role in promoting and strengthening local capacity and further participation of governmental actors at all levels to

ensure that **effective linkages** were in place from the arrival of the refugees and not only after phasing down.

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