Office of Internal Oversight Services

INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION

AUDIT REPORT

UNHCR repatriation programme in Mauritania

UNHCR needs to investigate the failure by the Representation in Mauritania to ensure that a competent implementing partner was selected and to monitor its activities

19 June 2009
Assignment No. AR2008/131/09

United Nations Nations Unies

INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM MEMORANDUM INTERIEUR

OFFICE OF INTERNAL OVERSIGHT SERVICES BUREAU DES SERVICES DE CONTRÔLE INTERNE

INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION DIVISION DE L'AUDIT INTERNE

TO: Mr. António Guterres, High Commissioner
A: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

DATE 19 June 2009

REFERENCE IAD: 09-07573

FROM Fatoumata Ndiaye, Acting Director
DE Internal Audit Division, OIOS

Fatoumata

SUBJECT **Assignment No. AR2008/131/09 - Audit of UNHCR repatriation programme in Mauritania**
OBJET:

1. I am pleased to present the report on the above-mentioned audit.

2. In order for us to close the recommendation, we request that you provide us with the additional information as discussed in the text of the report.

3. Please note that OIOS will report on the progress made to implement the recommendation, designated as high risk, in its annual report to the General Assembly and semi-annual report to the Secretary-General.

cc: Ms. Maha Odeima, Audit Coordinator, UNHCR
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Mr. Swatantra Goolsarran, Executive Secretary, UN Board of Auditors
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Mr. Christopher F. Bagot, Chief, Geneva Audit Service, OIOS

INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION

FUNCTION

"The Office shall, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Financial Regulations and Rules of the United Nations examine, review and appraise the use of financial resources of the United Nations in order to guarantee the implementation of programmes and legislative mandates, ascertain compliance of programme managers with the financial and administrative regulations and rules, as well as with the approved recommendations of external oversight bodies, undertake management audits, reviews and surveys to improve the structure of the Organization and its responsiveness to the requirements of programmes and legislative mandates, and monitor the effectiveness of the systems of internal control of the Organization" (General Assembly Resolution 48/218 B).

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Audit of UNHCR repatriation programme in Mauritania

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) repatriation programme in Mauritania, focusing on the programme's sole implementing partner, the Association pour la Lutte contre la Pauvreté et le sous Développement (ALPD). The overall objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy of the internal controls of ALPD and the effectiveness and efficiency of UNHCR in planning, coordinating and monitoring ALPD's activities. The audit was conducted in accordance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing.

In December 2008, the Bureau for Middle East and North Africa (M.E.N.A.) and the newly appointed Representative in Mauritania asked for an audit of ALPD since UNHCR had significantly increased funds allocated to this implementing partner (IP) from $48,000 in 2005 to $2.5 million in 2008. At the same time, the performance of the IP was not to the standard expected and an external audit report on the IP's project reports for 2007 showed serious internal control weaknesses. The Bureau for M.E.N.A. also raised concerns about the strategy adopted by the previous Representation in Mauritania (in place during the first year of the implementation of the repatriation programme) to work with only one partner, a national NGO, for such an important and visible operation.

OIOS found a number of weaknesses in the way the implementing partner handled the repatriation programme. For example:

- ALPD did not have an effective organizational structure. Most of the project activities were implemented in the field, yet all decisions were centralized in Nouakchott and controlled by the IP's president. The absence of any delegation of authority and the lack of established procedures in various areas of management significantly affected the performance of the operation.

- ALPD did not use a reliable accounting system for reporting to UNHCR. OIOS' review of ALPD's accounting system cast doubt over the accuracy and consistency of the financial information provided to UNHCR.

- Irregularities were noted in procurement activities delegated to ALPD such as the lack of transparency in the selection of the suppliers and questions as to the authenticity of the bidding documents and some of the invoices.

In the course of the audit, OIOS was able to establish the following irregularities indicating mismanagement of the project, which should be reviewed by UNHCR:

- It was not clear why ALPD was chosen as the implementing partner for the repatriation programme. Before signing the first sub-

project agreement, ALPD had had little or no expertise or experience in performing in any of the sectors concerned, such as transport and logistics, procurement, warehousing or shelter. The strategic decision taken by the Representation to work with only one partner, i.e., delegate to ALPD the implementation of all sectors of the repatriation project raised questions about UNHCR's risk management.

- In its implementation strategy, UNHCR did not identify the weaknesses of the partner, which existed at both the overall management and operational levels and in all sectors of the implementation of the repatriation project. UNHCR did not take appropriate measures to mitigate the related risks such as increasing its project monitoring activities and working on building the IP's capacity.

- There was no evidence of any formal training or other capacity building exercises in spite of ALPD's grave weaknesses.

UNHCR concurred with OIOS findings and recommendations, and took action to remove the implementing partner.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) repatriation programme in Mauritania. The audit focussed on the Association pour la Lutte contre la Pauvreté et le sous Développement (ALPD), the sole UNHCR implementing partner (IP) for this project. The audit was conducted in accordance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing.

2. The UNHCR Representation in Mauritania is currently implementing a programme aimed at repatriating about 25,000 persons who fled Mauritania, mainly to Senegal, at the end of the 1980s. The project started in June 2007 when the president of Mauritania officially invited all refugees in exile to return home. In August 2007, UNHCR launched a supplementary appeal to which the donors responded generously. In September 2007, the UNHCR Representation in Mauritania signed a sub-project agreement with ALPD with an initial budget of UM230 million ($895,000). The agreement with ALPD was renewed for 2008 with a total budget of UM584 million ($2.5 million) as of October 2008.

3. *UNHCR informed OIOS that the sub-agreement with ALPD for the implementation of the repatriation activities in Mauritania was extended until 29 February 2009 pending the selection of new implementing partners for this programme. It was a temporary arrangement to prevent major interruption of the repatriation process for which the beginning of the year corresponds to the peak season. Sub-agreements have been signed with new implementing partners for the continuation of the repatriation programme. Although ALPD is no longer a partner for the repatriation programme, it is still involved in UNHCR protection activities in Nouakchott pending the identification by UNHCR of a suitable partner for the implementation of its protection programme.*

4. Comments made by UNHCR are shown in *italics*.

II. AUDIT OBJECTIVES

5. The main objectives of the audit were to assess:

(a) The adequacy of ALPD's internal control system and accounting and reporting systems for the implementation of the UNHCR repatriation programme in Mauritania; and,

(b) The effectiveness and efficiency of the UNHCR Representation in planning, coordinating and monitoring ALPD's activities.

III. AUDIT SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

6. The audit, which was conducted in December 2008, focused on the activities of ALDP carried out in 2007 and 2008, involving $3.4 million.

7. The audit reviewed the ALDP accounts for the projects SB/MAU/RP/330 carried out in 2007 and in 2008. The audit included a review of:

- The overall management and organizational structure of ALPD;
- ALPD's financial records and the internal control system established by ALDP in relation to the implementation of the UNHCR repatriation programme;
- The implementation of the recommendations made by the external auditor contracted by UNHCR; and
- UNHCR's management of the overall programme activities delegated to ALPD.

8. In the course of the audit, OIOS met the UNHCR Representation management and the external auditor contracted by UNHCR to audit the 2007 sub-projects implemented by ALPD. The audit team also discussed the implementation of the external auditor's recommendations with the Director of ALPD and visited ALPD's warehouse in Nouakchott. Site visits to Rosso and Bogué, sites of implementation of the UNHCR repatriation project, were also conducted.

IV. AUDIT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Review of IP - Association pour la Lutte contre la Pauvreté et le sous Développement

Ineffective organizational structure and lack of delegation of authority and accountability framework

9. A clear organizational structure and a defined delegation of authority and responsibility are essential to implement good governance and accountability in an effective manner throughout the organization. Clear decision making channels are also important for the organization to take prompt action and adequate measures in programme implementation.

10. The ALPD's organizational structure showed that all decision making power was concentrated in the President's hands. At field sites, while there was a site manager, OIOS understood that he had no delegated authority, nor any clear delegated responsibility. Site managers and administrative staff (in Nouakchott) were to consult the President before taking any action. The lack of any delegated authority, which resulted in a lengthy decision process, had a negative impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of the repatriation programme implementation. UNHCR agreed with the OIOS assessment and took action to replace ALPD as implementing partner. No additional action is therefore proposed.

No procedures manual in place

11. The existence of an internal control system in an organization is the best tool to ensure that operations are conducted in an effective and efficient manner. OIOS could not find any evidence that the IP had established procedures for procurement, cash disbursements, warehouse management or petty cash management. UNHCR agreed with the OIOS assessment and took action to replace ALPD as an implementing partner. No additional action is therefore proposed.

Lack of a reliable accounting system raised doubts over the accuracy and consistency of the financial information provided to UNHCR

12. An accounting system is a minimum requirement to guarantee that financial operations are properly recorded with a clear tracking system. It should also provide data for analysis of expenses, including budgetary control.

13. ALPD had no proper accounting system to support its financial management. The current accounting records consisted of bank and cash journals prepared on Excel spreadsheets. Bank and cash reconciliations and other project records were not prepared and submitted to UNHCR. UNHCR agreed with the OIOS assessment and took action to replace ALPD as an implementing partner. No additional action is therefore proposed.

ALPD bank account management, cash management and cash disbursement processes did not comply with UNHCR requirements

14. OIOS' review of the IP's financial records showed that most of the payments were made by cash. While OIOS understood that cash is the preferred way to pay commercial transactions in Mauritania, the systematic use of cash could be replaced by cheque or bank transfers. Cash disbursements should only be used in exceptional cases.

15. Cash management was poor. OIOS noted that ALPD hand-carried the cash to field locations despite the existence of adequate banking facilities in field locations. Despite the amount of cash kept in field offices, OIOS noted that in Bogué, the cash was not kept securely. There was also no evidence of regular reconciliations with cash in hand.

16. ALPD's procedures for bank account management were questionable. The bank reconciliations as prepared by ALPD were not in line with the usual practices and accounting standards. The result of the exercise was also unreliable due to the inaccuracy of the accounting records. For instance, OIOS noted a difference of about $300,000 between the closing balance of the bank journal as of 31 December 2007 and the amount reported as the opening balance for 1 January 2008. Significant amounts appearing on the bank reconciliation as non-reconciled items could not be explained. By re-performing the bank reconciliation, OIOS observed the following:

- Cheques were paid by the bank sometimes a few months (up to 6 months) before they were recorded in ALPD's bank transaction journal and reported to UNHCR as project expenditures. This irregularity raised doubt on the validity of the corresponding charges, which amounted to UM131,199,700 ($525,000);

- Cheques totalling UM11,692,500 ($46,700) issued in May 2008 were still outstanding (not yet paid by the bank) in December 2008. These charges to the project should be deducted from the project expenditures.

17. UNHCR agreed with the OIOS assessment and took action to replace ALPD as an implementing partner. No additional action is therefore proposed.

Unsatisfactory action taken to implement the external auditor's recommendations

18. The external auditor's management letter relating to its May 2008 audit report on ALPD highlighted several weaknesses. In order to address these recommendations, ALPD created an internal audit committee (composed of the President and two other employees of ALPD) and prepared a detailed action plan and a list of recommendations that ALPD considered already implemented. However, OIOS' review of the accounting records submitted to UNHCR for the last part of 2008 and the observations on the internal controls in place in field locations, including warehouses, revealed that the corrective actions taken by ALPD were not satisfactory. UNHCR agreed with the OIOS assessment and took action to replace ALPD as an implementing partner. No additional action is therefore proposed.

Significant improvements are required to make ALPD's procurement activities in line with UNHCR's requirements

19. Procurement represented a key function in programme implementation and should have been strengthened by clear procedures and guidelines. Procurement represented more than 70 per cent of the total budget. Given that ALPD was not pre-qualified for procurement on behalf of UNHCR, ALPD was required to comply with UNHCR procurement rules. OIOS found significant weaknesses in the procurement function from the planning to the receipt and delivery of goods.

20. Procurement items were purchased according to immediate needs and not in accordance with a procurement plan based on the scheduled programme budget. Some procurement transactions may have been decided upon the availability of funds. For instance, OIOS found that seeds and water pumps (costing UM12 million in total or about $48,000) bought in December 2007 for gardening activities were used only in November 2008, 11 months after their procurement.

21. OIOS observed the inadequacy of the procedures followed by ALPD for the selection of suppliers. There was no evidence of market research for potential vendors; and solicitation documents were not in line with UNHCR rules and

procedures. In spite of the volume of some transactions, there was no proper procurement committee established for the selection of the supplier. A procurement committee was created in July 2008 in order to implement the external auditor's recommendation. However, this committee did not bring any added value or objectivity to decisions since two of its three members were directly involved in the procurement process.

22. In reviewing ALPD project records and documents supporting payments, OIOS identified several issues that raised suspicions about the authenticity of the procurement process. Most of the supporting documents submitted by ALPD as evidence of a bidding process were not convincing. The proposals from vendors presented by ALPD did not contain the information expected from commercial documents such as a trade registration number, bank account number, VAT number. In addition, bidding documents reviewed by OIOS were prepared in the same way implying that different vendors sent identical proposals including the same grammar and spelling mistakes. OIOS doubted the authenticity of the proposals presented for its review.

23. OIOS also identified other weaknesses in ALPD procurement procedures such as:

- Delivery notes evidencing the delivery of items were missing;

- Some invoices were prepared by the same person. For instance, telephone cards were bought in three different places but the invoices were written in the same way and by the same person;

- Pricing sometimes appeared unlikely when the volume procured was taken into account. For instance, reinforcing bars bought in large quantity were more expensive than the same bars bought in smaller quantity and on the local market (UM1,401/bar against UM1,000/bar on the local market);

- Invoices from the same vendor with which ALPD contracted twice were signed by the same manager but with two different signatures.

24. UNHCR agreed with the OIOS assessment and took action to replace ALPD as an implementing partner. No additional action is therefore proposed.

Human resource management in ALPD did not meet UNHCR expectations

25. The human resources budget represented another significant part of the total budget allocated to ALPD: UM99 million ($400,000) for 2008. Human resources management is a critical area for the success of this operation and required proper managerial procedures. However, OIOS found several examples of weak human resource management practices.

26. Most of ALPD's employees did not have regular employment contracts, instead they were working under a service provider agreement. According to the

external auditor, because there was an employee/employer relationship between ALPD and the persons employed under the UNHCR project, the service provider contract was not in accordance with Mauritanian legislation.

27. ALPD did not retain income taxes from the employee salaries and did not pay the social contributions to the government as an employer. The ALPD President explained that he considered the project staff as service providers and not employees. UNHCR agreed with the OIOS assessment and took action to replace ALPD as an implementing partner. No additional action is therefore proposed.

ALPD stock inventory procedures, warehousing management and distribution records need to be strengthened

28. Being in charge of warehouse management ALPD should have established rigorous procedures for stock management, from the receipt of goods to their delivery to beneficiaries and regularly provide UNHCR with a stock inventory of non-food items (NFIs) and shelter materials. OIOS visited three different warehouses and reviewed relevant documentation maintained by ALPD.

29. Documentation shown to OIOS did not provide sufficient evidence that adequate stock project records were kept or maintained on a regular basis. There was no supporting document to justify stock movements. Bills of lading were available only for the goods received from suppliers. There was no such document for goods moved from one ALPD warehouse to another. There were no proper dispatch notes to show the effective items delivered to beneficiaries. OIOS had doubts about the authenticity of the stock cards since they seemed to have been recently prepared: they were clean, without being stained or dog-eared as would be expected if these cards had been in use for a year.

30. OIOS could not find any evidence of a regular physical inventory of NFIs and shelter materials.

31. OIOS also noted weaknesses in reporting to UNHCR on distribution and inventory management. Stock reports providing a reconciliation of the quantities issued out with the distribution of NFIs and shelter materials were not provided to UNHCR, nor was there a monthly summary of stock movement and balances on hand.

32. Based on the observations made and a review of documentation available, stock inventory and warehousing management was assessed by OIOS as ineffective, inefficient and lacking transparency. There were doubts about supporting documents presented by the IP, which seemed to have been prepared only for compliance, not as a stock management tool. UNHCR agreed with the OIOS assessment and took action to replace ALPD as an implementing partner for the repatriation programme. No additional action is therefore proposed.

33. In the light of the above findings and the significance of the weaknesses observed, OIOS is of the opinion that an investigation be carried out to determine whether the significant control weaknesses (doubtful invoices, salary

disbursements and NFI deliveries, questionable procurement procedures coupled with weak financial management) have led to embezzlement of UNHCR funds.

Recommendation 1

(1) The UNHCR Representation in Mauritania, in cooperation with the Bureau of M.E.N.A. should refer the case to the UNHCR's Inspector General Office for further action, including an investigation, if deemed appropriate.

34. *UNHCR accepted recommendation 1 and stated that UNHCR Mauritania and the Bureau of M.E.N.A. also agreed with this recommendation and pointed out the disturbing news they continue to hear from the new partners who took over ALPD's activities. It appears that at the field level, a number of irregularities have been discovered. All indications in dealing with suppliers in Nouakchott seem also to confirm that there was never any bidding process in the capital or in the field.* Recommendation 1 remains open pending confirmation that the case has been submitted to the Inspector General Office for further action.

B. Programme Management

Representation failed to discharge its duties to ensure that a competent implementing partner was selected

35. There was no documentation available in the Representation's file on the selection process, particularly on the criteria used. There was no evidence that other NGOs (national or international) had been contacted to submit their candidature. There was also no information on who, among the staff of the Representation, was directly involved in the selection process. Before signing the sub-agreement for the repatriation project, ALPD had no expertise in the sectors in this programme.

36. In order to be considered by UNHCR as an implementing partner, an NGO must demonstrate financial reliability through the production of annually audited financial statements. The documents that ALPD submitted as financial statements before signing the first sub-agreement were not audited financial statements and demonstrated the lack of financial reliability of the organization.

37. The legal status of this organization indicated that ALPD was created in 1999 by only one person, the current president of the IP, which explained the weakness of the organizational structure and the absence of any delegation of authority.

38. ALPD was previously involved in the implementation of projects for other UN agencies (e.g., FAO, WFP, UNICEF, UNDP) but was no longer working for any of them. The UNHCR Representation failed to ensure that the interests of UNHCR were protected through the hiring of a competent implementing partner, in accordance with UNHCR guidance. *The Bureau for M.E.N.A. indicated that it had expressed their concern regarding the selection of*

ALPD to the previous Representative at the time the partner was chosen. The Bureau would support the establishment of stricter guidelines and requirements by the organization for the choice of a partner in order to avoid this type of situation in the future. OIOS is referring the failure by the Representation to select a competent implementing partner to the UNHCR Inspector General for investigation.

Monitoring of the IP by the Programme Unit

39. The monitoring of the narrative and financial parts of the Implementing Partner Financial Monitoring Report (IPFMR) submitted by ALPD should have been done by the Programme Staff in Nouakchott. Both performance and financial monitoring of ALPD by the Programme Unit were found to be inadequate.

40. To facilitate financial monitoring, all original supporting documents of the sub-project implemented by ALPD were kept in UNHCR's Office in Nouakchott for review by the Programme Unit. There was however no evidence that these documents had been reviewed by the Programme Staff. OIOS noted for instance an absence of any notes for the file on the observations made in the verification process; and no evidence of questions raised, clarifications requested or recommendations addressed to ALPD.

41. The Programme staff informed OIOS that they did not have time to go to the field locations for field monitoring activities. They indicated that since the Management System Renewal Project's (MSRP – UNHCR's Enterprise Resource Planning System) roll-out, they spent 80 per cent of their time working on MSRP. The support of the field in the monitoring of an IP's activities is essential. There were no specific instructions from the Representation to the field offices staff to undertake monitoring of the partner.

42. The UNHCR staff that OIOS met in field offices expressed some frustrations that they were not involved in monitoring ALPD. They stated that they had tried to perform some checks, which were not usually well received by ALPD. The monitoring done by the field staff was aimed at verifying whether the returnees have received the expected ration of food and NFIs from ALPD. However, they were not in a position to verify whether all items purchased by the partner with UNHCR funds had been distributed to genuine beneficiaries. The verifications made were also limited because the field staff did not have a copy of the sub-project agreement (and the budget) and the IPFMRs for verification.

43. For the verification of the salaries paid by ALPD, which represented 20 per cent of project expenditure, involvement of UNHCR field offices was essential. However, ALPD's employees were not all known to UNHCR staff and ALPD was reluctant to share with UNHCR its staffing list. One monitoring procedure would be for UNHCR Nouakchott to share ALPD's records of payments with the Head of the field office for the verification of the presence of staff in the field.

44. The Representation in 2007 failed to put in place an adequate system of control to monitor the activities of the implementing partner, increasing the risk of fraudulent activities taking place and damaging the reputation of UNHCR. This matter needs to be to be reviewed by UNHCR. *The Representation informed OIOS that, following the audit mission, the monitoring of new partners is made through monthly field missions undertaken by the Senior Programme Assistant, and constant checking through the Senior Logistics Coordinator, National Programme Officer and Representative. The field offices have also been informed of the role they will be expected to play in the monitoring of the implementation of the partners' activities, in coordination with the Senior Programme Assistant.* OIOS is referring the failure by the Representation to perform effective monitoring over the IP to the UNHCR Inspector General for investigation.

Representation failed to select a competent external auditor to review the accounts of the implementing partner

45. The process followed by the Representation for the selection of the external audit firm was in accordance with UNHCR rules. However, inconsistencies were observed in the process. A request for an offer was sent to three local audit firms. However, only one of them replied. There were no letters of acknowledgement or regret from the two other audit firms.

46. A review of the work of the auditor further confirmed OIOS opinion on the need for an internal inquiry into the selection process. Audit certificates were obtained for the first time for the 2007 sub-projects although one had been required for 2006 since the aggregate budget of ALPD exceeded $100,000. Had an audit been done in 2006, the serious deficiencies of ALPD could have been identified prior to signing the subsequent sub-project agreement with ALPD. Mitigating measures could have been taken or a more reliable partner could have been sought.

47. In spite of the seriousness of the internal control weaknesses reported by the external auditor, an unqualified opinion was issued. The external auditor explained to OIOS that his opinion referred only to the issues presented to him by ALPD and not on the overall financial management of the project. The ambiguity of the external auditor's opinion could result in misleading the reader of the report.

48. Some of the audit procedures followed by the external auditor were found to be inappropriate. For instance, the auditor performed his review of the project records by using photocopies of the payment records available at ALPD. The original accounting documents were kept at the UNHCR Representation. In addition, contrary to the terms of his offer, the auditor did not carry out a physical inspection of the sites of the repatriation project.

49. In the opinion of OIOS this is an additional example that brings into question the competence of the Representation of Mauritania in the handling of this project and the need for this issue to be reviewed by UNHCR. OIOS is

referring the hiring of the external auditor to the UNHCR Inspector General for investigation..

Insufficient UNHCR involvement in building ALPD's capacity

50. According to UNHCR staff, the working relationship between UNHCR staff and ALPD staff was quite poor (particularly in Bogué). OIOS was of the opinion that the ALPD seemed not to understand the notion of partnership and the role of UNHCR in the coordination and monitoring of project activities. It was reported that ALPD management did not always reply to UNHCR questions or requests for information. They deemed that UNHCR was interfering with their management. There were misunderstandings and difficulties and UNHCR's constructive comments were perceived as criticism. As a result, the work environment was not conducive to implementing the repatriation programme.

51. The difficulties in working in closely could be explained by the lack of communication between both organizations, the organizational structure of ALPD, the cultural differences between ALPD and UNHCR and the lack of experience of ALPD staff in implementing a large humanitarian project.

52. With regard to the role of UNHCR in capacity building, OIOS noted that there was also no evidence of any formal training or other capacity building exercises in spite of ALPD's grave weaknesses. For instance, UNHCR Mauritania had not been proactive in the area of procurement, warehouse management or human resource management. Coaching on these issues and close monitoring of the related activities were needed. Familiarization with UNHCR's Code of Conduct would also be highly advisable. *OIOS was informed that following the audit mission training sessions have been initiated.* Based on the action taken by the Representation, no additional action is proposed.

C. Strategic Management and Planning

Extensive use of non-UNHCR workforce

53. The UNHCR Representation in Nouakchott was understaffed. The organizational structure of the field offices in Rosso and Kaedi was also very weak with the Head of Field Office as UNHCR's only regular staff member in the professional category. As a result, there was a widespread use of non-UNHCR staff since most of the workforce are United Nations Volunteers (international and national). *UNHCR stated that a Senior Logistics Coordinator has been recruited, as well as a UNV for logistics, mass information and as a Senior Administrative Assistant. All efforts are being made to secure additional programme support to enable the Senior Programme Assistant to carry out his monitoring and project control activities. The office nevertheless continues to request more continuous programme support as the National Programme Officer is also completely overwhelmed and now deals with four partners rather than just one.* Based on the action taken by the UNHCR Representation in Mauritania and by the Bureau for M.E.N.A., no recommendation has been made.

Deficiencies in planning and refugee profiling resulted in frequent revisions of strategy

54. The repatriation programme was initiated in June 2007 as a result of a request from the Government of Mauritania to repatriate the Mauritanians exiled at the end of the 1980s in Senegal and Mali. A supplementary appeal was launched in August 2007 aiming at raising funds to repatriate about 25,000 Mauritanian refugees from Senegal and Mali. The repatriation programme was to start in the last quarter of 2007. Although some assessments of the situation at the returnee sites had been done during the second half of 2007, planning and preparation for the repatriation was not completed before the first convoy of repatriates arrived in Mauritania in January 2008. As a result, this programme was affected by frequent changes in the strategy in various sectors/activities such as: shelter, water and sanitation and the repatriation package. In addition to increasing the cost of the programme, the frequent changes in strategy may have caused dissatisfaction among the beneficiaries.

55. The initial strategy for housing was to provide repatriates with a permanent house. Due to weather constraints, this was changed to temporary shelter. Then due to funding problems these temporary shelters turned into permanent ones. The strategy for water, which aimed to rehabilitate a number of wells had to be changed due to the lack of water. A year and an half later a permanent solution for the provision of water in most of the repatriation sites (especially in the Brakna region) had yet to be found. UNHCR through ALPD is using trucks to distribute water in several camps.

56. The repatriation package of NFIs was also significantly modified after the first convoy. It was found insufficient to attract candidates for repatriation. Instead of using only NFIs received from UNHCR Liberia, a large number of items had to be procured locally, which had a significant impact on the financial resources available for this programme.

57. The weakness in the profiling of the refugee population carried out by UNHCR Senegal and the difficulties in communication between UNHCR Mauritania and Senegal were often cited as the main sources of the difficulties in planning and preparing the site for the return.

58. It seemed that the weaknesses in the profiling exercise affected UNHCR's decision to establish a field office at Kaedi when most of the repatriation activities took place in Bogue, a distance of one and a half hours from Kaedi. The choice of Bogué as a field office would have been justified by the fact that ALPD's logistics team and warehouse were based in Bogué. In addition to operational deficiencies, this decision had a financial impact especially the cost of DSA, fuel and other running costs of vehicles.

59. In the opinion of OIOS this further brings into question the competence of the Representation of Mauritania in the handling of this project and the need for this issue to be reviewed by UNHCR. OIOS is referring these deficiencies to the UNHCR Inspector General for investigation.

V. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

60. We wish to express our appreciation to the Management and staff of UNHCR for the assistance and cooperation extended to the auditors during this assignment.