**Executive Summary**

This report presents the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the final evaluation of the Joint Program “*Supporting the Return/Resettlement of IDPs/Expellees to the Communities of Origin/new resettlement areas in Eritrea (2004-2009)*”. The evaluation was undertaken in 26 May-22 June 2010.

The team met with many stakeholders: government officials, donors who supported the program, participating UN agencies, as well as the JP coordinators and zoba staff from Gash Barka, Debub and Southern Red Sea regions. The team also drew upon the proceedings of the midterm review of the program conducted 3-4 December 2009 which involved all stakeholders, the reports of the midterm review of the UNDP 2007-2011 Country Program Action Plan (CPAP) and the UNDAF 2007-20111(United Nations Development Assistance Framework) , as well as the substantial documentation in the form of annual reports of the JP, minutes of the various committees of the JP (Steering Committee, TWG, Annual review meetings with the regions) and monitoring reports. Unfortunately field visits during the actual evaluation was not possible, but the team benefited from the field assessment visits to the intervention sites of the Joint Program made by two members of the evaluation team (Dr Zemenfes Tsighe and Dr. Senait Bahta) during the midterm review of the UNDP CPAP, a few weeks prior to this assignment.

At the end of a 30-year protracted war of independence, followed by a border conflict with Ethiopia (1998-2000), Eritrea was faced with massive population displacement (an estimated 1.1 million people were uprooted from their homes and had lost their means of livelihoods) and widespread destruction of the socio-economic infrastructure. Following the cessation of hostilities approximately 700,000 returned to their villages spontaneously. About 300,000 were assisted to return to their villages and provided with transport and other basic necessities. However, several thousand faced obstacles to return and remained in camps under harsh conditions, receiving assistance from government and the international community.

During the past eight years, substantial rehabilitation and reconstructions of war-damaged infrastructure has taken place under government programs supported by the UN and key donors and the World Bank. Other key players included donors (Italy, Netherlands, USAID, European Commission, and Norway) and several UN agencies (UNICEF, UNHCR, UNOCHA WFP, UNFPA, etc).

Ensuring that IDPs, expellees, returnees and other war-affected and drought-affected are reintegrated and have secure livelihoods and access to basic social services, is one of the national priorities of the Government of Eritrea. In accordance with this, the UN System and the GSE agreed that Emergency/Recovery to be one of the focus areas of the UNDAF (2007-2011). The goal of UNDAF is in this regard was “*By 2009, assist the Government through an integrated multi-sector approach, to ensure that IDPs, expellees, returnees and other war and drought-affected are reintegrated and have secure livelihoods and access to basic services*”.

In late 2004, there were 12,976 HHs (50,853 persons) internally displaced persons (IDPs) in camps/host communities in Gash Barka. In the same period there were also 4,714 HHs (20,354 persons) in camps in Debub. Moreover, there were 1,995 HHs (10,900 persons) in host communities in and around Tessenei and Goluj Sub Zoba in Gash Barka. In November 2004 a joint program between GoE and participating UN agencies (UNDP, UNICEF, UNHCR and WFP) was signed Joint Programme (JP) addressing the return/resettlement needs of 30,000 IDPs and expellees from Adi keshi, Kotobia and Mai Wurai emergency camps. In March 2006, the GoSE decided to return/resettle all IDPs/expellees and close all emergency camps and for this reason the First Phase JP needed revision and expansion in content and resources. This resulted in a revised and expanded joint program which was signed by the GoE and UNDP, UNICEF, UNHCR and UNFPA for the recovery-related activities of some 12,633 HHs (52,544 persons) who were in camps/host communities. These IDPs/Expellees consist of 11,000 persons from *Mai Wurai* and *Kotobia* camps, as well as IDPs and Expellees from the emergency camps in Metera, Shambuqo and those in the surroundings of *Tsorona* and *Senaf*e towns. The IDPs/Expellees are to return to some 14 villages of origin or new re-settlement areas over the period of 2006 and 2009. It was then agreed that the IDPs/expellees will be assisted to return/resettle in areas that have been cleared of landmines and unexploded ordnances.

The overall objective of the JP was to support the Government in the return and resettlement of IDPs/expellees to the communities of origin or new settlement areas and to have secure livelihoods and access to basic social services. The program was implemented in Gash Barka, Debub, and Southern Red Sea Regional Administrations. The activities envisaged under the Joint Program consisted of the following components: (i) the safe and dignified transportation of the IDPs; (ii) provision of potable water supply and sanitation facilities; (iii) provision of shelter (temporary and permanent); (iv) provision of agricultural inputs and services (seeds, tractor ploughing, farm hand tools, restocking of livestock) and environmental rehabilitation/protection through soil and water conservation interventions, community PV solar systems, fuel saving stoves, and income generating activities(beekeeping development and cash for work safety net program); (v) building the capacity of regional administration. In all interventions priority was given to some of the most vulnerable households specially, by women headed households.

Most activities were implemented through a pool fund managed by UNDP as lead agency. Other activities were funded under the parallel programs of other UN agencies (UNICEF, UNHCR, UNFPA) such as food aid rations, school feeding, supplementary feeding, school rehabilitation and temporary school construction and supplies, health facilities rehabilitation including health post construction and supplies and promotion of health services at their respective return/resettlement sites, and provision of education equipment/materials.

The overall conclusion of the evaluation team is that the JP was a highly successful program, all the more remarkable given the complex socio-political context within which it was implemented. All IDPs and expellees that were still in camps (17,690 households or 71,207 persons) have been successfully and safely transported with their belongings from camps to their villages of origin or new settlements in the designated areas from 2005 to 2008. Hence, all IDP/expellees camps were closed by March 2008. The functional movement areas of villages of origin and resettlement areas were cleared of land mines and/or marked with signs, and Mine Risk Education given to communities. Additional surveys are being conducted, and continuous road and farmland verification is being conducted. Mine action has been very effective, and there are no reports of causalities in villages of origin or resettled areas so far. Massive rehabilitation, reconstruction and reintegration works have been going on between 2005 and 2009. IDPs/expellees and returnees are being provided with shelter, basic social services, improved stoves, home solar systems, farm tools, oxen, land clearance and traction, seeds (12 kg/ha), and land (1-2 ha/household) to ensure livelihood security. Consequently, IDPs and expellees have started a dignified and purposeful life, free from the uncertainties of camp life. In the focus group discussion, beneficiaries reported: “*In the camps, yes we had enough to eat, but now we have our own land, our own houses, and we are now in full control of our lives*”.

Contributions to support the JP came from a variety of sources: UNDP and GoSE, financial support by the Norwegian Government, Italian Government, USAID, UNOCHA and European Union. Out of a total program budget of USD 60 million, some USD 46 million has been mobilized of which over 90% has been delivered, making it a highly efficient operation.

The evaluation team assessed the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability of the program. The Joint Program was judged to be highly relevant by the team. It was a top priority of GOSE and an important plank in the government’s post-war reconstruction effort which was to expeditiously repair damaged socio-economic infrastructure and help uprooted populations quickly return to normalcy. The JP contributed to this effort and built upon earlier efforts of government and the international community. The JP reflected the development and humanitarian concerns of the UN in Eritrea as expressed in the UNDAF (2002-2006; 2007-2011), as well as assistance frameworks of donors (both bilateral and multilateral). The target regions (Gash Barka and Debub) suffered the most damage and were at the epicenter of displacement and return – these regions were also critical to the socio-economic recovery of the whole country because of their economic potential. The target beneficiaries were those IDPs/Expellees whose return to areas of origin was for various reasons proving difficult to achieve, hence heightening the risk of trapping them in protracted displacement situation - the majority of the beneficiaries were female headed households, resource-poor, as well as those that lost all assets and personal possessions – those segments of the population of key concern to government. However, a few weaknesses: assistance tended to be somewhat fragmented in some instances, driven by the legitimate concern and need to reach the largest number of beneficiaries – it is important to stress though that this also very much dictated by the type of intervention. For example water supply schemes, micro dams, agricultural inputs and services and social safety nets cover almost all beneficiaries while others such as shelter and beehives have been provided to the most vulnerable families due to shortage of resources. The lack of baseline information meant that impact assessments were difficult but not impossible to undertake.

In terms of efficiency, the decentralized approach to program implementation for the pool-funded activities proved to be very efficient. Funds were directly transferred to the Zobas in accordance with agreed AWP which are prepared by the implementing Zobas and approved by UNDP. Assistance was given to beneficiaries as soon as it is available – beneficiaries received assistance by signing forms which stated the terms under which support is provided. The public/community participation mechanisms created employment, increased sense of ownership, reduced costs and speeded up implementation. For example, in CFW activities, the use of local/community team leaders to mobilize the community, keep records of attendances, measure work done (norms) significantly improved the timeliness of operations and payments, thus resulting in improved efficiency and greater cost-effectiveness. The high delivery rates of the program reflect the efficiency of operations both at the level of UNDP, Zoba and at lower levels. Pooled resources were well managed as evidenced from the audit reports of 2007, 2008 and 2009. The funds were managed in compliance with both donor agreements and UNDP corporate requirements. The full integration of program into existing structures of both UNDP and regional administrations reduced overheads significantly, while at the same time enhancing sustainability.

The JP was highly effective as it was a government-driven initiative and the structures established were appropriate and accountable to authorities/stakeholders at different levels (Central government, donors, UNDP, Regional/local Administrations, communities). The main lesson to be derived from this experience was that it is possible to handle emergency/humanitarian operations within existing structures in an effective and efficient manner without recourse to costly and unsustainable parallel structures. Eritrea appears to set a good example in this regard. The planned outputs were delivered well and the outcomes largely achieved, except when budget constraints stood in the way (e.g. shelter for Gash Barka). Factors that contributed to such effectiveness were the relevance and appropriateness of the support provided, as well as the fact that the regions were in the driving seat and the planning process was flexible and adaptive.

In terms of impact, there are significant indications of positive impact – the statement by a beneficiary: “*In the camps, yes we had enough to eat, but now we have our own land, our own houses, and we are now in full control of our lives*”, perhaps best sums up the measure of overall impact. Much socio-economic infrastructure has been built where previously there was none, and this has definitely improved access to social services. Previously women trekked long distances on daily basis to fetch water but this is now much reduced in many communities. Conservation works are rebuilding the natural resource base that will contribute in the long-term not only to enhancing productivity but also conserving biodiversity and reducing soil/land degradation and ensuring long-term sustainability. Moreover, SWC structures are often built on farmers’ own land which means that their maintenance over the long run is taken care of.

The team noted that the program has in place upward and downward accountability mechanisms. The management and oversight mechanisms internally within UNDP, as well as nationally and regionally, appear to work well. There was however a weakness with respect to closer monitoring of parallel funded activities due to staff changes within the relevant UN agencies. Fund management was transparent and effective as shown by audit reports, financial reports and high delivery and disbursement rates. Throughout the life of the program the relevant technical reports (annual reports), independent monitoring reports (e.g. ROM) were produced, and these were comprehensive and useful. Payments for work done, for example, for SWC works are transparent and fully recorded, verified and signed by the various parties involved (sub-zoba officials, team leaders and beneficiaries). There are many ways in which the JP sought to strengthen downward accountability: zoba administrations know the resource envelop available for each activity and for each planning period and sign the AWP with UNDP; communities are in turn gathered by the zoba/sub-zoba officers and informed on the resources available and the number of beneficiary households; communities with their local administrations (kebabi) and committees are responsible for selecting beneficiaries; development committee meetings are held on a monthly basis, and elections to the various committees are also regularly held; and communities and beneficiaries obtain redress through established channels and can hold zoba/sub-zoba and project officials accountable.

Interventions under the JP have promoted gender equality and women’s empowerment in many ways. Overall, more than 60% of the total target populations of the program are female-headed households. Environmental interventions which addressed reduction of fuel wood consumption through provision of fuel-saving stoves in households and provision of community solar-based household energy exclusively targeted women and female-headed households. In all livelihood security interventions, female-headed and resource-poor households were priority targets. In this case, female-headed households constitute 60% in provision of shelter, 64% in provision of seeds and tractor ploughing, 100% small ruminants for income generation and child nutrition and 67% participants in cash for work are women.. In the target communities, women and girls are responsible for fetching water. Provision of access to potable water implies reduction in women’s workload and having more time for income-generating activities as well as time for schooling for girls. Hence, the intervention enhanced women empowerment and gender equity. Women are well-represented (40%) in local development committees. Women’s increased representation and participation in the program has influenced resource allocations and policies by making them to address women needs and prioritized concerns.

The evaluation team made ten recommendations on the way forward as follows:

1. Maintain Transition and Recovery as the overarching framework for the program, at least for the next two years, but with increased emphasis on the longer-term perspective.
2. Adopt an inclusive and integrated area-based approach within the localities of operation for the joint program.
3. The program focus should shift more towards providing livelihood support, but continue to provide basic social services where these are in critical shortage.
4. More holistic efforts are made to strengthen capacities at zoba and lower levels, including community structures and households.
5. The recommended strategy of an area-based inclusive approach, and expansion of the program both within and outside the current regions dictate that resource mobilization efforts should be intensified.
6. Further efforts made to strengthen gender dimensions in program, building upon the very positive start made.
7. While maintaining the current structures established to oversee program implementation, strengthen institutional framework for the JP, particularly in revitalizing the national steering committee.
8. The NEX modality, pooled funding and decentralized implementation have proved highly successful and should be maintained.
9. To strengthen program monitoring and improve chances for significant resource mobilization, the team recommends better and unrestricted access (taking into account security considerations) to program sites.
10. Efforts be made to streamline procurement to make it predictable, rapid, efficient and in accordance with international standards.

The evaluation team concluded that the JP has been an effective and successful program and has undoubtedly helped and provided an opportunity for large segments of the war – affected population to begin to restore their lives and livelihoods. It has been effective in addressing the needs of the vulnerable such as, female-headed households, children and poor families, and contributed to closing the chapter on war and displacement in Eritrea, and by helping to rebuild critical socio-economic infrastructure, restore livelihoods is also contributing to laying the foundation to medium and long-term socio-economic development, to poverty reduction and attainment of the MDGs for the country. The JP has succeeded to consistently respond and provide support to very deserving communities in a very complex and politically sensitive context in a commendable way. Furthermore, there are several obvious indicators of positive impact on the ground and on the lives and livelihoods of individuals, households and communities.

The program was characterized by sound and affective partnerships (donors, UN agencies, government, regional administrations, and affected populations). By privileging links with regional administrations, the program has not only ensured rapid and effective implementation but has strengthened program ownership by the regional administrations and contributed critical capacity building support. The lean and efficient program management structures and integration within existing regional structures have ensured that most of the program resources are directed at the beneficiaries rather than the traditional heavy and costly program implementation structures. However, while maintaining the strong decentralized operational links with regional administrations, there are benefits to establishing stronger links with central government/line ministries in order to better anchor the future program to evolving national policy but importantly also to feed the very significant lessons learnt from the JP into national policy making process as Eritrea shifts to longer-term development- indeed the evaluation team of the view that the lessons learnt need to be documented both for national as well as regional and international use.

The UN agencies have generally worked well together and the leadership and management role played by UNDP has been commendable. Steps however need to be taken to strengthen the collaboration and coordination among UN agencies involved in the JP to make it a truly joint program. Greater efforts should also be made to allocate more core resources from the agencies concerned to the program. There is overwhelming preference for the pooled funding modality by donors and regional administrations – both Debub and Gash Barka - and this should be the modality for the future program.