



The Sudan/Eritrea
emergency,
May - July 2000

*An evaluation of
UNHCR's response*

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Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit

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Aims, process and methodology

This report derives from an extensive analytical process that has included a 'real-time' evaluation in the field and a 'learning workshop' in Geneva, as well as a review of relevant documentation and detailed consultations with key stakeholders on the author's initial findings and recommendations. The primary objective of this process has been to determine the effectiveness of UNHCR's response to the Sudan/Eritrea crisis of mid-2000 and to assess more generally the adequacy of the organization's emergency response mechanisms.

A real-time evaluation (RTE) is a timely, rapid and interactive analytical endeavour, undertaken as an emergency operation unfolds. The immediate impetus for the RTE in Eritrea and Sudan was the 'Plan of action for strengthening UNHCR's capacity for emergency preparedness and response', introduced by the organization in the aftermath of the 1999 Kosovo crisis. The plan of action recommended that the organization 'introduce real-time evaluations in order to be able to undertake rapid, analytical evaluations of ongoing emergencies, and provide suggestions for improvement, as appropriate, while they can still make a difference.'

The RTE notion is not, however, a new one. In 1992, for example, a review of UNHCR's performance in the Persian Gulf crisis recommended that future emergency evaluations 'be undertaken in the initial phase of an emergency operation by UNHCR staff members and consultants who are not burdened with operational responsibilities.'

This RTE involved a combination of individual and group interviews with stakeholders (staff of UNHCR, UN agencies, governments and NGOs, as well as displaced persons) in Sudan, Eritrea and Geneva. It also entailed site visits in the field and participation in the crisis cell established in Geneva for the Sudan/Eritrea emergency operation. The author of the report followed the work of the crisis cell from 31 May 2000 and undertook a mission to Sudan (Khartoum, Kassala and Es Showak) and Eritrea (Asmara, Tessenai and Akordet) between 13 and 27 June 2000.

Initial outputs from the RTE included a debriefing session with UNHCR staff-members in Asmara, in which a first version of the report was disseminated, and the presentation of the review's findings to a meeting of the crisis cell in Geneva. A third and revised RTE report was then distributed to key stakeholders.

A number of stakeholders have commented constructively on UNHCR's first attempt to undertake a real-time evaluation. In view of the potential importance of the RTE as a UNHCR evaluation tool, a short paper on this methodology will be prepared. It will reflect upon the pilot RTE, and develop suggestions for a revised RTE framework.

Another innovation associated with this evaluation was the convening of a 'learning workshop' in Geneva, chaired by the Deputy High Commissioner. This event provided around 25 key internal stakeholders, from Headquarters and the field, with an opportunity to take stock of the operation and to engage in a detailed discussion of the recommendations presented in this report. The recommendations herein reflect the consensus of this workshop.

While the report itself has attempted to assimilate and reflect the different viewpoints expressed at the workshop, this report is an independent production of the Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit. The evaluation was undertaken by Arafat Jamal, Operational Policy Officer in UNHCR's Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit. It has been reviewed and edited by Jeff Crisp, Head of EPAU.

Summary of findings and recommendations

1. In mid-2000, UNHCR launched an emergency operation in eastern Sudan and Eritrea in response to a complex pattern of population displacement provoked by the final stage of the two-year border war between Ethiopia and Eritrea.
2. In some respects, the Sudan/Eritrea emergency was a relatively straightforward one. It took place in an area well known to UNHCR. The number of refugees involved was modest in comparison with many other recent emergencies, and the emergency phase itself lasted little over two months. Those people displaced by the war were in reasonably good health when they left their homes. They were able to take some possessions with them and benefited from the generosity of the host population. Neither refugees in Sudan nor returnees and IDPs in Eritrea encountered major protection problems.

Key findings

3. UNHCR's response to the emergency was characterized by energetic and often innovative action. As in other recent crises, UNHCR staff members demonstrated enormous commitment and made substantial personal sacrifices in their efforts to meet the needs of the organization's beneficiaries. UNHCR performed particularly well in the logistics sector, ensuring that appropriate relief items reached emergency-affected areas in a timely manner.
4. While the factors cited above clearly facilitated UNHCR's response to the emergency, other considerations complicated its task. Externally, these included some serious funding constraints, the demanding physical and operational environment encountered in Sudan and Eritrea, as well as the very different characteristics of the two states. These factors undermined the effectiveness of UNHCR's leadership and coordination roles.
5. Internally, lines of command and responsibility were not always clear, preventing UNHCR from making optimal use of the emergency response tools at its disposal.¹ While the Geneva-based crisis cell helped to ensure a degree of coordination between the different UNHCR entities involved in the emergency, there were misunderstandings in some quarters regarding its role and decision-making authority. Some confusion also arose over the extent to which certain units were expected to take decisions, or to provide services on request from other parts of the organization.
6. Emergency staffing and deployments emerged as a major issue of contention in the emergency. Regular posts were underfilled at the start of the crisis.

¹ Available tools are compiled in the 'Catalogue of Emergency Response Tools' (EPRS, May 2000).

Emergency deployments were used, both to cover for these vacancies and to cope with the additional burdens of the emergency. The Nairobi-based Regional Service Centre played a key role in some of these deployments. While individual performances were in many cases exemplary, several of the deployments were inefficiently used owing to confusion over their roles and reporting lines.

7. In a number of respects, the Sudan/Eritrea operation confirmed the need for UNHCR to further strengthen its emergency performance, as indicated by the organization's May 2000 'Plan of action for strengthening UNHCR's capacity for emergency preparedness and response'. As suggested by the following set of recommendations, particular efforts are needed in relation to issues such as the structures and procedures established to manage emergency operations; emergency deployments and staffing arrangements; UNHCR's role in the shelter sector; and the relationship between needs assessment and resource mobilization in emergency operations.

Recommendations

8. The following recommendations are rooted in the findings of EPAU's real-time evaluation of UNHCR's response to the Sudan/Eritrea emergency. They were finalized on the basis of the 'learning workshop' held in Geneva in September 2000, as well as extensive post-workshop comments from key stakeholders. They are complementary to UNHCR's May 2000 'Plan of action: strengthening UNHCR's capacity for emergency preparedness and response'.

Management and emergency procedures

9. As in past emergencies, a major issue arising from UNHCR's response in Sudan and Eritrea was the need for more concentrated decision-making authority, as well as a clearer allocation of responsibility for the implementation and consequences of those decisions. The emergency procedures invoked by Headquarters should have elucidated matters. In practice, however, their scope and content were not always clear. To address this issue, UNHCR should clarify what exactly is meant by emergency procedures and ensure that the authority to use these procedures, and take responsibility for the resulting outcomes, is clearly defined.

10. UNHCR's current emergency procedures are disparate in nature. They should be consolidated, augmented as appropriate, and then incorporated into a single, user-friendly document. This document should serve as an authoritative guide, to be used whenever an emergency is declared. The nature of this document (i.e. whether it takes the form of an Inter-Office Memorandum, an addition to UNHCR's *Emergency Handbook* or some other product) should be determined by senior management, in close consultation with the recently established Emergency and Security Service (ESS).

11. Once they have been formulated, the emergency procedures should be effectively communicated to all senior and mid-level managers and other relevant staff. Emergency training efforts managed by ESS should target key personnel from those sections likely to be involved in the implementation of emergency operations.

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Such training should identify the different emergency scenarios that most commonly confront UNHCR, and detail the potential management responses to them. Emergency management training should evidently take full account of lessons learned from past emergencies

Declaring an emergency

12. The existence of a formal and credible emergency phase provides UNHCR with a powerful means of focusing attention on a critical situation, and enabling exceptional measures to be taken in respect of it. The decision to declare an emergency must be taken at the highest level, in close consultation with the Representative(s) on the ground and ESS.

13. In order to maintain its tautness and effectiveness, an emergency phase must be discrete, with sharp start and cut-off points. Keeping an emergency phase time-bounded encourages UNHCR to work towards regularizing its internal arrangements (management, posts) and orienting its programme away from emergency relief.

14. Clearer criteria for the declaration of an emergency are required. In this respect, it is proposed that the following factors be taken into account:

- UNHCR's ability to manage a given refugee situation using available resources;
- The complexity of the operating environment.
- The anticipated duration of the population displacements.
- The level of external interest in the situation. A lower level of interest may in fact make it more incumbent upon UNHCR to declare an emergency.
- The magnitude of the outflow. While scale is a factor, it is not conclusive. In some cases, a relatively small population displacement may also qualify if it has a preponderance of some of the above factors.
- The nature of the population movement. IDP movements in particular must meet further criteria before UNHCR can be involved with them and declare them to constitute an emergency.

The 'day one' phase

15. The declaration of an emergency and associated decisions about policy and management parameters will be taken during the critical 'day one' phase. It is crucial that lines of authority are clearly laid out, in written form, at this point. In addition to enabling the use of emergency procedures, senior management may at this point wish to establish certain exceptional and temporary emergency structures (as was the case, for example, with the appointment of a Special Envoy for the Persian Gulf crisis, the establishment of the Special Operation for Former Yugoslavia and the Special Unit for Rwanda and Burundi. In emergencies involving more than

one country or Regional Bureau, responsibilities for different sectors and activities (e.g. repatriation) should be clearly spelled out.

16. If a crisis cell is established, its terms of reference should be drafted at this point. The 'day one' phase is also the moment at which a designated emergency situation electronic archive should be established, enabling different sections and mobile staff members to have easy access to relevant documents and correspondence.

Content of emergency procedures

17. Emergency procedures enable UNHCR to mount an extraordinary response and enact exceptional measures in response to displacement crises. An emergency requires, in the first instance, an increased resource pool, which might comprise both internal reallocations as well as new, external inputs.

18. A number of elements already exist: Emergency Letters of Instruction, emergency procurement modalities, budget reserves, emergency deployments, emergency PARs, etc. UNHCR's *Catalogue of emergency response tools* provides a comprehensive list of the different resources available.

19. The objective of the new document on emergency procedures will be to compile existing ones and, where gaps are evident (e.g. emergency post-filling), elaborate ways of filling them. Once formulated, knowledge of emergency procedures should be imparted to senior and mid-level managers. ESS-managed training should target key personnel from various sections likely to be involved in emergencies. The training should elaborate various emergency scenarios, and detail the different management responses to them. Training should evidently take into account lessons learned from past emergencies.²

Resources

20. The issue of resources, and the manner in which UNHCR mobilizes them for its programmes, is a fundamental determinant of the effectiveness of any emergency operation. At present, the budget formulation process suffers from too much self-censorship, and a lack of transparency and communication between field personnel, who effect rapid needs assessments, and the Headquarters units that prepare and trim budgets before they are presented to donors.

21. When planning and implementing emergency operations, UNHCR's activities should ideally be predicated upon the essential needs of its beneficiaries, rather than on anticipated donor responses. However, given that resource constraints must at some stage be factored into the equation, it is important that the budget elaboration be as transparent as possible. In particular, UNHCR's field offices should be a party to any decisions that are taken to tailor or downsize budgets before they are submitted to donors.

² Recommendation 21 of the Emergency Plan of Action pertains to this subject.

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Staffing and emergency deployments

22. UNHCR currently has no formal emergency procedures for the filling of vacant posts. And apart from two-month, non-renewable emergency roster deployments, the organization has no mechanisms to ensure that emergency operations are staffed in a reasonably stable manner by means of missions and other temporary arrangements, pending the creation and filling of posts.

23. Regarding temporary deployments, while a considerable number of UNHCR staff members have been deployed to the emergency, often in a timely manner, there has been some confusion over their specific roles and utility. Before any staff member is sent to the scene of an emergency, both the sending and receiving unit should be clear about the need for such a deployment, the profile required and the tasks the person will be expected to perform.

24. Staff deployments from different sources (ERT roster, technical deployments, Regional Service Centres, external teams) should be centrally tracked and recorded; this could be effected by a focal point from the crisis cell, if one is established, or from any other central emergency management point.

25. Technical specialists help to improve the quality of UNHCR programmes, and enhance its managerial role by providing the credibility required to coordinate other specialized agencies. Previous emergency evaluation have consistently stressed the need for such personnel to be on the ground at the start of an emergency. However, with a few notable exceptions, this has not been the case in Sudan and Eritrea. Technical specialists should be deployed in a more predictable and consistent manner, and at the start of an emergency. To the extent possible, in-house expertise should be used first, before resorting to stand-by personnel.

26. Field security personnel should be deployed automatically at the start of an emergency, tasked with establishing an initial security plan, and determining future security needs.

27. While the Nordic stand-by arrangements have proved their worth by providing critically needed and qualified personnel in emergencies, in the context of the current emergency, there have been some concerns. Persons deployed by external stand-by agencies should always work under the close supervision of a regular UNHCR staff member in order to ensure quality control, compliance with UNHCR policies and guidelines, and on-the-job training.

Protection and IDPs

28. Refugee protection was not a major issue in the Sudan/Eritrea emergency, owing to a combination of favourable operating environment (no refoulement in Sudan, no harassment of IDPs or returnees in Eritrea) and swift UNHCR action to avert potential protection problems.

29. There was and is a strong case for UNHCR's involvement with internally displaced people in Eritrea. At the beginning of the emergency, UNHCR raised a number of expectations regarding its proposed role with IDPs. It then retreated somewhat on this matter and committed fewer resources to the IDP situation.

Although there is a general UNHCR policy on the organization's involvement with IDPs, guidance regarding its operationalization has been largely absent, leading to some apparently arbitrary decisions on the role and extent of UNHCR's involvement in Eritrea. Beyond Eritrea, it should be recalled that there are sizeable IDP populations in neighbouring countries – Sudan and Ethiopia – with which UNHCR is scarcely involved.

30. While efforts should be made to facilitate repatriation to Eritrea, the special protection needs of groups such as soldiers, other combatants and draft evaders, must be respected and addressed. If they are deemed not to qualify for refugee status, other entities, such as the ICRC, should be encouraged to assume responsibility for them.

31. The needs of other vulnerable groups, such as unaccompanied minors, female-headed households and elderly refugees, must also be attended to. Protection as well as Community Services Officers have major functions in this arena. UNHCR Sudan has already played a key role in facilitating these processes.

32. UNHCR should be strongly involved with IDPs in Eritrea for a number of reasons: to meet the needs of IDPs who are at risk of being left without assistance; to demonstrate the organization's commitment to its new policy on IDPs; and to sustain the credibility of UNHCR in Eritrea and thereby support its future presence in that country.

33. While resource availability is a solid parameter that influences the effectiveness of UNHCR's activities with IDPs, once a commitment has been made by UNHCR to be involved with a given IDP situation, the lack of resources should not be used by UNHCR as an excuse to withdraw from or downscale IDP programmes.

34. UNHCR's operational role with IDPs in Eritrea should be carefully reviewed and assessed against the standards set out in its new IDP policy. Other IDP situations, both those in which UNHCR is involved and those in which it is not, should also be examined in a similar vein. The issue of operational policy guidance on IDP issues – the translation of policy into programmes – needs to be addressed.

Sectoral issues

35. There is a general assumption that UNHCR will assume responsibility for the provision of shelter and the task of camp planning in refugee-related emergencies. Despite such expectations and the fact that UNHCR is consistently involved in camp planning, it does not have a standard emergency shelter response. Instead, the organization appears to rely on ad hoc measures.

36. Shelter and camp management are inevitably political issues, with security and status implications. Any démarches in this area that go beyond technical issues will necessarily involve the host government.

37. Experience in Sudan and Eritrea suggests that UNHCR should reinforce its capacity in the camp planning sectors in order to meet the high expectations placed upon the organization by other actors, and the fact that it is consistently involved in these activities. UNHCR should elaborate a shelter and camp planning policy that

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clearly outlines the scope of its roles and responsibilities in this sector. At the field level, beneficiary inputs into the suitability of various shelter options should be sought. Where these issues go beyond technical planning discussions, and delve into camp management, concerned governments may need to be drawn into the debate.

38. UNHCR should pursue efforts to find alternative shelter materials, products and suppliers. To facilitate this task, the organization should compile a catalogue of shelter types appropriate to a range of climates and cultural contexts, and should indicate standby arrangements with suppliers that show prices and delivery lead times.

Partnerships

39. The Sudan/Eritrea emergency operation provided a clear demonstration of the extent to which UNHCR's performance is determined by its partnership arrangements. Many of the difficulties encountered in programme delivery in Sudan can be attributed to UNHCR's reliance on a governmental implementing partner (COR) with whom it has a troublesome history and working relationship. During the emergency, UNHCR's room for manoeuvre on this matter proved to be very limited.

40. While in the context of the current emergency UNHCR has enjoyed a productive working relationship with its main governmental partner in Eritrea, ERREC. This has not always been the case, however, and previous misunderstandings have led to the severe downscaling of UNHCR's presence there.

41. In the short term, the organization should seek to improve the situation by ensuring that standard programme and project monitoring requirements – e.g. overhead cost ceilings, detailed sub-agreements and project monitoring reports – are respected. This must be done without jeopardizing the well-being of refugees.

42. A longer-term strategy is also required to provide a definitive solution to this protracted issue. Such a strategy should attempt to alleviate some of the more egregious aspects of the current relationship with COR without compromising UNHCR's longer-term position in what is likely to remain an important refugee-hosting country. The details of such a strategy remain to be elaborated in conjunction with UNHCR Sudan.

43. In order to build partnerships for the future, UNHCR should, in addition to working with ERREC, continue to broaden its cooperation with other entities in Eritrea so that relief interventions phase smoothly into longer-term reintegration and rehabilitation efforts. Such an approach will promote the sustainable return of those Eritrean refugees who have been in Sudan for decades and who wish to return home. The harmonious inter-agency relations that exist in Eritrea should be consolidated so as to facilitate the attainment of this objective. Relations with non-governmental actors should also be enhanced and expanded.

Sudan: the Eritrean influx and repatriation

Eritrean refugees fleeing to Sudan were able to cope with their displacement as a result of their own good health, the possessions they took with them, the generosity of host communities and the speedy reorientation of existing UNHCR resources from repatriation to emergency mode. However, the effectiveness of UNHCR's emergency response was limited by the strained relationship that existed with its governmental partner, as well as the ineffectiveness of certain emergency staff deployments.

44. Fighting between Eritrea and Ethiopia has engendered successive waves of displacement since the 1960s, both to Sudan and within Eritrea. UNHCR has had an equally long history of involvement in the region: its presence in Sudan dates back to 1967. During that time, it has assisted varying numbers of Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees, from 1.1 million persons at the peak in the mid-1980s to around 391,000 at the end of 1999.

45. In September 1999 the 'ceased circumstances' cessation clause of the 1951 Refugee Convention was applied to pre-1991 Ethiopian arrivals in Sudan. By this time, the circumstances had also changed for the remaining Eritreans in Sudan, and many were willing to repatriate. By April 2000, some 9,000 were poised to return home in a UNHCR-organized movement. In May, however, an upsurge in the Eritrea/Ethiopia conflict prompted some 90,000 Eritreans to flee to Sudan, thereby throwing the UNHCR operation into reverse. On 6 June 2000, High Commissioner Sadako Ogata 'invoke[d] emergency procedures in order to provide rapid and effective response in protection, health, sanitation, shelter and water sectors and other needs.'³

46. Compared to many other refugee situations, this was a 'simple' refugee emergency in the sense that it involved a group of people who fled from an inter-state war to a country in which they were welcomed and where they faced few protection problems. The theatre of operations was accessible, well-known to UNHCR and equipped with a reasonable infrastructure. Judged by the minimum standards of UNHCR's *Emergency Handbook*, the refugees were in reasonable condition and had access to reasonable services.

47. The new refugees were aided by a number of other factors. They had some advance notice of the Ethiopian attack, and were thus able to take some vital possessions with them. Once inside Sudan, the country's longstanding generosity towards refugees became manifest, as host communities (some of which comprised old caseload refugees) welcomed the Eritreans into their homes and provided them

³ 'Emergency for Sudan/Eritrea', IOM/FOM 42-43/2000 (6 June 2000).

with food and other items. Local charities and religious organizations helped to fill the gaps in food distribution.⁴

UNHCR's contribution

48. UNHCR was quite well placed to receive the new arrivals, as it had both personnel and limited relief stockpiles in Es Showak and Port Sudan, placed there in preparation for the repatriation of old caseload Eritrean refugees. The presence on the ground of a senior staff member from the Branch Office in Khartoum ensured that the reorientation of the UNHCR programme was effected swiftly and smoothly, and that there was effective coordination amongst the UNHCR offices in the east of the country.

49. Existing personnel and relief resources in other parts of Sudan were also redeployed to Kassala, and played an essential role in meeting immediate emergency needs. WFP, which also had established relief stockpiles in Sudan, reinforced UNHCR's response to the emergency.

50. UNHCR proved effective in mobilizing resources from other parts of the world for the new emergency. Airlifts and shipments brought relief items from warehouses in Copenhagen, Tirana and other locations. Many of these items came not from regular emergency stockpiles, but were left over from the 1999 Kosovo emergency.

51. By using and reorienting existing resources in Sudan, UNHCR was able launch an assistance programme and to address potential protection problems. In the latter realm, UNHCR oversaw the relocation of refugees who were located close to the Sudan/Eritrea border. Interventions were also made in response to reports of sexual violence being committed against female refugees.

52. An adequate number of UNHCR staff - both those on the emergency roster and others - were deployed to Sudan, although not always in a timely fashion or with the most appropriate profile. Public information officers were among the first personnel on the scene of the emergency, and helped to put the crisis on the global media map.

53. As suggested already, this emergency was not characterized by high levels of mortality or malnutrition. Nevertheless, the refugees were adversely affected by the patchy coverage of the relief operation. In June 2000, for example, the water and sanitation sectors were assessed to be 'at a low level of development', posing 'a serious health risk that should be addressed as soon as possible, preferably before the

⁴ The similarities with the situation in 1985 are striking. A contemporary evaluation report described the situation thus: 'The operation benefited immensely from a receptive host government; an already existing implementing structure with almost two decades of experience in assisting refugees; the controlled nature of the influx; an all weather road from Port Sudan and Khartoum that significantly reduced logistics problems; and certainly the Representative's emergency experience as well as the tremendous amount of energy relief workers dedicated to the operation.' (*Review of UNHCR emergency preparedness and response in eastern Sudan*, p. 7).

rainy season'.⁵ The haphazard way in which camps developed, resulting from the absence of a site planner, also had a negative impact on the provision of assistance and the installation of essential infrastructure.

Partnership problems

54. The operation in Sudan proved to be a relatively inefficient one, in the sense that an energetic and wide-ranging UNHCR response did not produce commensurate outputs or impact. This inefficiency derived largely (but not exclusively) from the operational environment in Sudan, which was shaped to a significant degree by organization's main implementing partner, the Sudanese Commissioner's Office for Refugees (COR).

55. The difficulties surrounding UNHCR's relationship with COR are longstanding and well-known. Essentially, the two organizations are working at cross-purposes. UNHCR is committed to finding a durable solution for refugees in Sudan, an objective that would enable the organization to scale down its activities in the country. COR, on the other hand, has an institutional interest in maintaining the funding and employment opportunities that derive from the presence of UNHCR and its refugee programmes.

56. COR was founded in 1967, soon after UNHCR began working in Sudan. Thirty years on, it has a staff of some 1,800 and is funded entirely by UNHCR. Last year, \$1.35 million was paid to the organization for staff salaries alone, a sum that does not include various incentive payments and allowances.

57. Jobs are scarce in eastern Sudan, and COR is one of the area's largest employers. As noted by a 1989 UNHCR evaluation report, a job with COR 'is coveted and, once secured, is not readily relinquished. Not surprisingly, the organization tends to concentrate on its own survival'.⁶

58. The divergent objectives noted above had a negative impact on UNHCR's response to the emergency. With the human and other assets at its disposal, COR should have managed the frontline response to the influx, leaving UNHCR to channel resources to the area, provide technical inputs to the operation, and monitor the protection situation.⁷ Instead, UNHCR's partner often proved to be an obstacle, blocking and delaying even the most straightforward activities.⁸ As a result, vast

⁵ Stefan Meerschaert, 'Initial report: water and environmental sanitation conditions in Gulsa, Lafa and Shugrab,' 18 June 2000.

⁶ See two 1989 evaluation reports: *Review of UNHCR emergency preparedness and response in eastern Sudan* and *A review of COR staffing and salaries in the central and eastern regions of Sudan*, UNHCR, Geneva, March 1989 (SUD/EVAL/9).

⁷ As one internal report noted, in respect of technical deployments, 'It could have been expected that after so many year of collaboration between COR ... and UNHCR, COR technical staff would have taken an efficient lead on this "emergency". This, unfortunately, was not the case.' (Geneva, August 2000)

⁸ This was true in 1985 as well, when the emergency response was hindered, *inter alia*, as a result of 'the difficulty the key implementing partner had in quickly responding to the situation as well as in overcoming local interests and objectives that sometimes conflicted with programme objectives'. (*Review of UNHCR emergency preparedness and response in eastern Sudan*)

amounts of UNHCR staff time were spent not on operational matters but on negotiating with COR.

59. It would be a mistake, however, to blame COR alone for this unsatisfactory situation. For COR was effectively established by UNHCR, and has become used to receiving regular budget allocations. Curiously, moreover, COR appears to have escaped much of the scrutiny that UNHCR normally exercises in relation to its implementing partners. In this respect, the efforts which UNHCR made to introduce standard monitoring procedures during the Sudan/Eritrea emergency constitute a positive development.

Alternative approaches

60. The issue of UNHCR's relationship with COR will evidently have to be resolved in a comprehensive and definitive manner - an issue that lies beyond the ambit of this evaluation. And any such solution will evidently require coordinated efforts at the Branch Office, Regional Directorate and Headquarters levels. The Branch Office is well aware of the difficulties to be resolved, and has drafted several proposals for future action.

61. In the context of the emergency in mid-2000, UNHCR enjoyed little room for manoeuvre in terms of operational partnerships, and generally adopted a two-track approach: circumventing its main implementing partner by going directly to the Kassala provincial authorities and line ministries; and working in a co-optive and non-confrontational manner with COR personnel in the field. Neither approach proved entirely satisfactory.

62. In principle, working through the *walli* (governor) provided UNHCR with an alternative partner and supported the objective of establishing refugee programmes that meshed with the longer-term development interests of Kassala.

63. At the start of the emergency, the *walli's* office appeared to respond more quickly and effectively than COR. But its operational capacity proved to be limited, and within UNHCR, there was a growing concern that the *walli's* office could (like COR) become dependent on UNHCR funding and the refugees presence in the area. However, field reports suggest that the local authorities have been supportive of UNHCR's efforts, and have been instrumental in facilitating them, even in the face of COR opposition.

64. In the medium-term, the best option would appear to be a pragmatic one, forging solid linkages with field-level COR counterparts in an attempt to resolve immediate problems in a cordial manner. This approach is perhaps an obvious one, and it has some evident limitations. But in the prevailing context, it may help to attenuate the divergent priorities of the two organizations.

65. Additional training for COR staff in UNHCR's emergency management procedures also has a role to play in forging a more constructive relationship between the two agencies. That such training has an impact was illustrated by the case of Shagrab, where both the COR focal point and the UNHCR Field Officer had attended an emergency workshop in Nairobi. As a result, the COR staff member

understood UNHCR's working methods and terminology, and entered into a effective working relationship with the organization from the start of the emergency.⁹

66. International NGOs are present again in eastern Sudan, thanks in part to UNHCR lobbying. However, they are constricted in their scope of operations and, in the opinion of some informants, more interested in using the pretext of aiding refugees as a means of gaining access to IDP populations in the same areas. While UNHCR should continue to collaborate with them, they do not, at this stage, represent a viable alternative to COR.

The repatriation process

67. On 18 June 2000, Eritrea and Ethiopia signed a peace agreement, and refugees immediately began streaming back into Gash Barka, Eritrea. A few days later, following the spontaneous repatriation of some 6,000 people, the Eritrean Rehabilitation and Refugee Commission (ERREC) announced that the repatriation should take place at an accelerated rate - some 10,000 people a week - and that the returnees should be accommodated in special reception sites until conditions allowed them to return to their places of origin.

68. UNHCR was asked by ERREC to support this repatriation programme, a request which placed the organization in something of a dilemma. On one hand, UNHCR was loath to become involved in an initiative which might encourage refugees to return in a hasty manner and leave them accommodated in inappropriate and unserviced sites. On the other hand, the organization was reluctant to stand aloof from a repatriation movement that was clearly taking place on a voluntary basis and that would quickly bring an end to the emergency in Sudan.

69. In the event, the organized repatriation proceeded smoothly. As the security situation improved, the Eritrean authorities dropped their insistence on moving returnees to camps. The repatriation movements themselves were undertaken with the active involvement of UNHCR's community services officers, which helped to ensure that the refugees returned at a time and in a manner convenient to them and their families.

70. If the planned movement of returnees to reception sites was in some senses premature and potentially hazardous to the welfare of the people concerned, it can in other respects be regarded in a more positive light. The Eritrean government's view, supported by this evaluation, was that the refugees were better off at home, even if they were not immediately able to go back to their places of origin, many of which had been devastated by the war, and which in some cases were affected by land-mines.

71. Forming a backdrop to the emergency of mid-2000 were some 160,000 old caseload Eritreans who arrived in Sudan in successive influxes, some as far back as

⁹ A recent evaluation report urges UNHCR to develop a coherent and comprehensive strategy for training operational partners and governmental counterparts. See Fedde Groot, *Evaluation of UNHCR training activities for implementing partners and government counterparts*, Geneva, UNHCR, July 2000 (EPAU/2000/002, July 2000).

the 1960s.¹⁰ As indicated earlier in this report, the organized repatriation of this population, which was to have begun in May 2000, was derailed as a result of the emergency. It should resume as soon as conditions permit, beginning with the 9,000 refugees who had already registered to repatriate at the time of the emergency. In Eritrea, UNHCR has actively built upon the relations forged and lessons learned in the recent emergency operation, with a view to exploiting them in respect of the old caseload repatriation.

72. Despite the positive prospects for this repatriation programme, experience suggests that there are likely to be obstacles along the way, as well as the continued presence of 'residual caseloads' in Sudan. UNHCR should not, therefore, expect its programme in eastern Sudan to be phased out very rapidly.

¹⁰ There are even more Eritreans of indeterminate status located in urban areas. The US Committee for Refugees estimates that there are some 170,000 urban Eritreans (1999 country report, <http://www.refugees.org/world/countryrpt/africa/1999/sudan.htm>).

Eritrea: returnees and IDPs

UNHCR initially adopted a high profile with regard to the problem of internal displacement in Eritrea, a position that was subsequently belied by the low resource commitments made in relation to the operation. Moreover, the extent to which the organization's involvement in Eritrea was guided by the organization's recent policy paper on IDP operations was not apparent. UNHCR has nonetheless shown a commitment towards orienting its approach in a sustainable direction.

73. The Sudan/Eritrea emergency, as well as UNHCR's reestablishment in Eritrea after a two-year absence from the country, occurred at a critical juncture in the international debate concerning IDPs. In January 2000, Richard Holbrooke, US ambassador to the United Nations, expressed his reservations about the distinction traditionally made between refugees and IDPs, underlined the international community's inadequate response to the problem of internal displacement and called on UNHCR to assume a leading role in this domain.

74. Partly in response to this intervention, UNHCR re-examined its existing IDP policy and issued a new policy statement, asserting that the organization was 'predisposed' to an involvement with IDPs, as long as certain conditions could be met. These included the authorization of the UN and consent of the state concerned, access to the affected population, the security of UNHCR staff, as well as adequate resources and organizational capacity.¹¹

Eritrea and the IDP policy

75. Eritrea provided UNHCR with a timely case in which to test this new policy, as the IDP situation in that country met most if not all of the specified criteria for UNHCR involvement. Unlike other countries affected by the problem of internal displacement, people left their homes in Eritrea as a result of a war with a neighbouring state, and not as a result of civil war or persecution by their government. Indeed, the Eritrean government recognized its responsibility to meet the needs of citizens displaced by the border war.

76. In other respects, UNHCR's conditions for involvement were also met. The government granted UNHCR access to IDPs, except those located in front-line areas near Ethiopian positions, and it sought to guarantee the security of humanitarian personnel. The presence of IDPs and returning refugees in the same areas of Eritrea provided another rationale for UNHCR's involvement.

¹¹ *Internally displaced persons: The role of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*, UNHCR, Geneva, 6 March 2000.

77. For the reasons cited above, UNHCR initially mounted a relatively vigorous and visible response to the IDP situation in Eritrea. A memorandum issued by the High Commissioner on 6 June 2000, for example, committed UNHCR to '[fully participating] in the inter-agency effort on behalf of internally displaced people, in line with its position outlined in the position paper on IDPs of 6 March 2000'.¹² Similarly, in its June 2000 strategic plan of operations, the UNHCR office in Asmara made a strong case for the organization's involvement with the internally displaced.

78. Demonstrating UNHCR's commitment to the Eritrea programme, by 27 June 2000 some 16 international staff were on the ground. Significantly, one of the early deployments was a Public Information Officer, who helped raise international awareness of the IDP situation. UNHCR also made its presence and interest felt in meetings with government officials and other humanitarian agencies, thereby raising further expectations with regard to its role with IDPs.

79. Despite such expressions of intent, UNHCR's resource commitments to the IDP programme were initially low, and the organization soon appeared to retreat from the more expansive role which it had originally envisaged. This development exemplified what one staff member described as UNHCR's 'deep ambivalence at the policy level' regarding its role in Eritrea. By July, an appeal for \$23 million (\$13.3 million of this sum targeted for Eritrea) had been issued, and predictions that 50 per cent of the appeal would be met were considered realistic.¹³

80. In parallel with the reduction of resource commitments for the IDP programme, there was an apparent downward reassessment of beneficiary numbers. In the early days of the emergency, on 2 June 2000, the UNHCR office in Asmara spoke of some 550,000 IDPs in Gash Barka province, and another 200,000 in Debub, as being potentially in need of the organization's assistance.¹⁴ By the following month, however, UNHCR's appeal for Eritrea and Sudan stated that only 125,000 IDPs and 90,000 returnees, were to be targeted for UNHCR assistance.

81. A number of people interviewed in the course of this evaluation expressed frustration at the ambiguity of UNHCR's approach to the IDP problem in Eritrea, as well as the organization's apparent inability to translate its generic IDP policy into operational practice. As one staff member argued, 'at present there is no guidance and it is just a matter of contingencies. The UNHCR IDP operation in Eritrea could just as well have been half the size it is – or double. The only limiting condition seems to have been someone's judgement as to what was fundable'.

82. The question of an 'expectations gap' in respect of UNHCR's approach to IDPs is perhaps endemic to it, but still needs to be firmly addressed. With refugees, UNHCR's mandate is clear, and it does not have the choice of standing by. With IDPs, the case is different, and UNHCR does not intervene in all, or even most IDP situations. However, in the spirit of the new IDP policy, UNHCR must make its intentions clear, and then follow through. The danger is that, if it raises expectations as it did in Eritrea, but then does not follow through to the extent originally

¹² It is not however the lead agency for IDPs in Eritrea.

¹³ 'UNHCR special appeal for emergency assistance to Eritrean refugees in Sudan, Djibouti and Yemen, and returnees/IDPs in Eritrea', Geneva, 4 July 2000.

¹⁴ UNHCR Asmara, 'Strategic plan of operations.'

indicated, it loses credibility, and a group of needy persons risks falling between the gaps of the international system.

Future operations in Eritrea

83. One element of the emergency response in Eritrea that proceeded smoothly – UNHCR's relations with its governmental counterpart ERREC – is an issue that should be managed with some care. ERREC is the national institution charged with the overall coordination of programmes and activities related to natural and man-made emergencies and associated recovery programmes. It is accountable to the Office of the President and is headed by a Commissioner.

84. Despite the constructive relationship established in the recent emergency, UNHCR's strategic planning process should take account of the possibility for change. The organization's experience in independent Eritrea has been a problematic one, characterized by disagreements over resource allocations and leading to the effective closure of the UNHCR office for a two-year period. It is not out of the question that such difficulties could recur.

85. The UNHCR budget established during the emergency was understandably oriented towards emergency relief assistance. Given that the UNHCR programme is taking place in the context of a war-affected but internally peaceful state that is ready to begin reconstruction, planning for the relief to development transition should now be prioritized.

86. UNHCR has no interest in maintaining IDP or returnee camps any longer than is strictly necessary, and should look into ways of channelling its resources to longer-term projects, including Quick Impact Projects and seed distribution. It should also seize the opportunity to link its programme with those of development-oriented actors such as UNDP, a strategy supported and already being implemented by the UNHCR office in Asmara.

Emergency management and operational support

During the Sudan/Eritrea emergency, UNHCR was obliged to respond to a fast-moving crisis involving a refugee influx, a repatriation movement and a major IDP situation in two of the world's least developed countries. While UNHCR took speedy action to respond to these population movements, the emergency operation could have been managed in a more effective and efficient manner. To achieve this objective in future operations, UNHCR should ensure that the roles, responsibilities and authority of relevant organizational structures are more clearly defined. It should also revise its emergency procedures, particularly in the area of human resources.

Emergency evaluations at UNHCR

87. Before taking a look at the specifics of the case under review, it is worth noting some of the work UNHCR has undertaken in the domain of improving its emergency response. Over the past 15 years, UNHCR has undertaken a number of evaluations of its performance in various emergencies. Most recently, and of direct relevance to the operation in Sudan and Eritrea, was the independent evaluation of the Kosovo refugee crisis (2000). Other significant emergency evaluation have involved operations in Burundi and Rwanda (1996), former Yugoslavia (1994), the Persian Gulf (1992) and – coming full circle – eastern Sudan (1985).

88. The record on action taken by UNHCR as a result of these evaluations demonstrates both the organization's willingness and ability, in certain sectors, to undertake substantive changes, and its inability to learn from and make appropriate adjustments to account for recurring problems in others. On the plus side, UNHCR has come a long way in institutionalizing and deepening its range of emergency response structures and tools. The emergency section is a fixture at UNHCR, ready to play a critical role in crises in terms of operating internal and external stand-by staffing arrangements, training and staff and operational support. The gamut of such devices is compiled in the May 2000 *Catalogue of emergency response tools*.

89. Other areas identified in previous evaluation in which UNHCR has progressed include logistics and public information. UNHCR is now able to resort to streamlined and expedited procurement procedures, which was used to great effect during the current emergency. Likewise, public information, which not long ago was viewed with suspicion and often stifled by hierarchies, is now accepted as an important advocacy and profile-raising tool. Public Information Officers were amongst the first to be deployed in both Sudan and Eritrea.

90. On the negative side, many of the problems that have hobbled UNHCR's past emergency operations recur over the years, with Sudan/Eritrea being no

exception. The main such ones relate to unclear lines of authority and responsibility, and inadequate emergency human resource procedures.¹⁵

Structures

91. The Sudan/Eritrea emergency provided an important test for the recent restructuring of the organization's activities in Africa, which has led to the establishment of a Regional Directorate in Addis Ababa, covering Sudan, Eritrea and ten other countries in East and North-East Africa.

92. For political reasons, managing an emergency involving Eritrea from the Ethiopian capital raised some evident difficulties. Within UNHCR, concern was also expressed over the potential confusion in the respective roles and authority of the Regional Directorate and the organization's Geneva headquarters. In the event, however, such issues were not the source of major problems, largely because the Addis Directorate authorized Geneva to take daily management decisions on its behalf. It should be noted, however, that a number of people interviewed were sceptical about this arrangement, feeling that managerial authority should either have been fully centralized in Geneva, or fully decentralized to Addis Ababa.

93. As in past emergencies, the UNHCR operation was characterized by some ambiguous reporting lines, prompting many staff members ask who was actually in the 'driver's seat'. The Geneva-based crisis cell was a case in point. This specially created entity brought together all of the relevant headquarters units and met on a daily basis at the start of the emergency. At this point it helped bring the relevant people and units together, allowed managers to develop a comprehensive picture of the emergency and to consider alternative courses of action.

94. However, while the information-sharing aspect of the crisis cell has been exemplary, its decision-making capability has been weak. Indeed, it has not always been clear who exercises decision-making authority with respect to given aspects of the operation. This sense of confusion has not been shared by all involved in the operation. Some key members of the crisis cell felt that the lines of were very clear, and that it was also clear that the body was not to engage in decision-making. That authority rested with the Addis Ababa Directorate, who chose to delegate operational matters to Geneva. Given the confusion over this matter, it is recommended that written terms of reference be established for future entities of this type.

95. Undergirding, and to a large extent influencing the whole sector of internal performance is the subject of financial resources. This topic is broached later in this evaluation. Nonetheless, it is worth bearing in mind that in spite of mandate and principles, the actions of the Office, in this emergency as in others, are all too often guided by resource constraints, both actual and anticipated.

¹⁵ See also John Telford 'Recurring lessons from previous emergencies' (annexed to *Lessons learned from the Burundi and Rwanda emergencies*).

Decision-makers and service providers

96. The question of leadership in emergency operations appears to arise because it is unclear whether managers and units in UNHCR are decision-makers or service-providers. UNHCR has a number of structures and arrangements in place to help it cope with emergencies. The *Catalogue of Emergency Response Tools* issued by the Emergency Response Section provides a comprehensive list of these assets, which range from emergency response teams to external standby staffing arrangements, and from field kits for UNHCR staff to tents and other relief items for refugees. There are, however, different views with regard to the way such mechanisms are activated.

97. Should UNHCR operate in what some people describe as an 'à la carte approach', whereby headquarters units offer a selection of specialized services that are to be activated by the field? Or should UNHCR headquarters be more assertive, and impose set responses for different situations? The Sudan/Eritrea emergency demonstrated that there are disadvantages associated with each of these options, and that another approach is warranted.

98. The à la carte approach makes sense where lines of responsibility and authority are clear, and where decision-making units feel free to seek advice from the service-providing unit. In the case of Sudan, for example, the absence of qualified technical personnel from the initial emergency response teams was criticized by the receiving offices. The Branch Office in Khartoum felt that a number of technical specialists should have been sent to Sudan automatically, arguing that it was the responsibility of ERS to provide the field with a predictable mix of skilled personnel in an emergency.

99. ERS, on the other hand, saw itself as a service-provider. It made information available on deployment possibilities from the start of the emergency, but did not assume responsibility for taking unilateral decisions on whom to send to the field. As a result of this situation, the technical personnel required in the field took too long to arrive on the scene of the emergency - several weeks in certain instances. It appears that ERS suggested various 'menu' options, but left the ordering to the Branch Office in Khartoum. The Branch Office, for its part, submitted generic requests, apparently in the expectation that a seasoned emergency unit would be able to assemble an appropriate operational team.

100. Would strong and centralized decision-making have helped? Not necessarily. The decision to deploy an Emergency Preparedness and Response Officer to Sudan, for example, was taken in Geneva, apparently without the involvement of the Branch Office in Khartoum. The resulting deployment represented a poor use of resources and engendered some mutual resentment.¹⁶

101. UNHCR staff in both Sudan and Eritrea were also critical of what was perceived as micro-management by UNHCR headquarters. It was felt, for example, that Geneva needlessly second-guessed the field on minor issues involving technical

¹⁶ A document prepared by UNHCR Branch Office Khartoum entitled 'An outlook of the emergency in Sudan' presents, *inter alia*, a critical view of the way emergency deployments were effected.

shelter specifications, while being unable to take decisive action in relation to major issues such as UNHCR's involvement with returnees and IDPs in Eritrea. Concern was also expressed about the way UNHCR headquarters made deep and allegedly arbitrary cuts to budgets that were formulated on the basis of needs assessments undertaken in the field.

Emergency procedures

102. The experience of the Sudan/Eritrea emergency also suggests a need for UNHCR to revisit and reform its emergency procedures. As mentioned earlier, UNHCR's Sudan/Eritrea operation was formally launched by means of an inter-office memorandum, stating that 'emergency procedures' had been activated.

103. One would expect such procedures to override existing administrative arrangements, enabling the establishment of a clear command structure as well as accelerated staffing and procurement procedures.¹⁷ While this took place to some extent, no one directly involved in the management of the emergency had a very clear understanding of what the organization's emergency procedures actually entail. Greater clarity is evidently needed in relation to this matter, and it is therefore recommended that a memorandum be issued, explaining precisely what exceptional measures may be taken when an emergency is declared.

104. One important role that emergency procedures could play would be in the designation of what one informant termed the management 'point of delivery'; in other words, authority for decision-making and responsibility for the outcomes of decisions should be clearly fixed.

105. The decision to declare an emergency will depend on a number of factors. It is not dependent on scientific measures of outflow or persecution typology. Rather, perhaps the prime determinant of declaring a situation of concern to UNHCR an emergency would be the ability of the Office to cope with it. If resources and structures are in place, even a large outflow may not qualify. If, on the other hand, UNHCR has no presence in a given area, an emergency may have to be declared.

106. Beyond their content, the timing and duration of any emergency phase has an important bearing on its effectiveness. Declaring a situation an emergency focuses internal and external attention on it, and enables a taut response. Keeping an emergency phase time-bounded encourages UNHCR to work towards regularizing its internal arrangements (management, posts) and orienting its programme away from emergency relief.

¹⁷ The 1992 evaluation of UNHCR's performance in the Gulf Crisis recommended something of this sort: 'A formal mechanism is required, enabling senior management at Headquarters to declare that an emergency exists, thereby triggering a set of accelerated procedures relating to the commitment of expenditure, the mobilization of human and material resources and the identification of operational partners.' (, p. 5)

Staffing

107. As indicated earlier, staffing arrangements and emergency deployments were a major concern during the emergency. Neither Sudan nor Eritrea had enough staff to cope with the crisis, given that even their pre-emergency staffing tables were seriously underfilled. Despite the activation of emergency post-filling procedures, moreover, four key international posts remained vacant in Sudan at the height of the emergency, while in Eritrea, the entire international staff contingent was on mission status.

108. As a result of this situation, UNHCR relied heavily on deployments from the emergency roster and from other locations, including the Regional Service Centre in Nairobi. It is a strategy that has been questioned on a number of counts.

109. First, some staff members were deployed without proper terms of reference or clear reporting lines, making it difficult for them, and for the office to which they were posted, to determine what role they were supposed to assume. As well as addressing the terms of reference issue, UNHCR should ensure that the units who are despatching and receiving a staff member have communicated with each other on the precise nature and purpose of any emergency deployment, as well as the profile of the staff member concerned.

110. While it should be understood that field-based staff are responsible to the Representative, in the Sudan/Eritrea emergency it was not clear to what extent such staff, especially technical and protection deployments, should also be in contact with their units at headquarters.

111. Second, qualified and experienced personnel sent on emergency deployment were in some instances been misutilized, underutilized or placed in relatively marginal positions. When this occurs, the emergency operation evidently fails to gain maximum benefit from the deployment, the staff member concerned experiences personal frustration, and an unnecessary burden is placed on the office or unit which has released that person for emergency duty.

112. Third, certain parties involved in the Sudan/Eritrea operation felt that insufficient numbers of technical specialists were dispatched to the emergency areas. In this regard, it should be noted that UNHCR's Emergency Response Team (ERT) roster emphasizes the role of generalists who, while possibly 'proficient in specific functional areas of UNHCR operations (protection, programme etc.)... are expected to function with as much versatility and flexibility as possible'.¹⁸

113. Is this the correct approach? Given the importance of having technical specialists on the ground at the start of an emergency – an issue that has been underlined repeatedly in past operations – it seems that UNHCR should institutionalize the deployment of such persons.

114. Finally, it was felt in some quarters that too much use was made of gratis personnel, (such as those from the Nordic refugee councils) and that this staffing strategy became a cheap and 'quick-fix solution' to the problem of human resources.

¹⁸ 'Catalogue of Emergency Response Tools', p. 4.

According to this critique, more emphasis should be placed on the quality of such personnel and their familiarity with UNHCR principles, practices and procedures.

115. One concrete proposal made in regard to the Nordic deployments was that such personnel should always work under the close supervision of a regular UNHCR staff member. In similar vein, the 1992 Persian Gulf evaluation recommended that 'the number of Nordic personnel engaged should be in strict proportion to the number of regular UNHCR staff members available to provide them with proper guidance and supervision'.¹⁹

116. A positive development with regard to staffing, also pointed out by the Kosovo evaluation²⁰, concerns the introduction of performance appraisal reports for staff who undertake emergency deployments. This system should evidently be maintained, and used as a means of ensuring that emergency operations are staffed with the organization's most effective personnel. For as the Kosovo evaluation also suggested, UNHCR's reputation and credibility is measured in large part by its performance in refugee crises.

117. Another positive achievement in Eritrea and Sudan was the rapid deployment of both public information and external affairs officers to the emergency. The former were among the first to arrive in both countries, and played critical roles in relaying information on the emergency to the international media. In some cases, they may even have performed too effectively, in the sense that they raised expectations of UNHCR's role that were ultimately not met.

118. One idea currently being developed to avoid some of the problems of team composition and reporting lines is that of an 'office in a box', in which pre-formed team modules are dispatched to emergencies.²¹ While this is a promising approach for larger emergencies in countries with a light UNHCR presence, such as Eritrea, it is not likely to be viable in situations such as the Sudan, where additional staff are needed to support rather than supplant existing structures.

119. A final human resource issue to emerge during the emergency was that of the ratio between international and local staff, particularly in Eritrea. Some respondents felt that this was lopsided, with too many expatriates in place. In view of the fact that returnees and IDPs in Eritrea were not in need of international protection, it was felt that more emphasis could have been placed on employing Eritreans who would continue working in the post-relief phase.

¹⁹ *Review of UNHCR emergency preparedness and response in the Persian Gulf Crisis*, p. 8.

²⁰ 'To improve surge capacity through rapid deployment, UNHCR should systematically document emergency participation, undertake systematic performance reviews of emergency participation, and assign it importance for promotion...' (*The Kosovo Refugee Crisis*, p. xv).

²¹ Something similar was suggested in a 1995 Executive Committee paper. It noted that procedures for the creation and filling of longer-term posts 'would be considerably accelerated by the establishment of standard models for the organization and staffing of Sub-Offices and Field Offices in emergencies with standardized organigrams and pre-classified job descriptions.' ('Lessons learnt from the Rwanda emergency' (7 June 1995, EC/1995/SC.2/CRP.21)).

The shelter sector

120. In this as in other emergencies, UNHCR was widely regarded as the UN's shelter and camp management agency. While not strictly accurate, this perception is understandable in an inter-agency and emergency context. Just as WFP brings in food and UNICEF specializes in sanitation, to many external actors, the provision of shelter is UNHCR's responsibility. UNHCR struggled to meet these expectations in the Sudan/Eritrea emergency, due to difficulties on a policy level, a global supply level, and at the country level.

121. In terms of policy, there was some confusion within UNHCR over the nature and extent of the organization's involvement in the shelter sector. In addition, during the initial phase of the emergency it remained unclear what form of shelter assistance beneficiaries should receive: large tents, small tents, a simple supply of plastic sheeting, some plastic sheeting with a supportive frame, or an 'emergency shelter package'.

122. Pre-empting the question of what sort of shelter UNHCR should provide was the issue of supply. Once stocks had been diverted from the Balkans, UNHCR found it difficult to purchase an adequate supply of appropriate tents from the global marketplace. In this respect it should be noted that the stockpiling of tents has been the subject of much debate within UNHCR, a major practical problem being that tents are notoriously susceptible to deterioration when kept in storage for protracted periods of time.

123. Within Sudan, UNHCR encountered serious problems with the distribution of tents that were already in the country. Available stocks languished for long periods in COR warehouses and, even upon delivery to the camps, were subject to further delays before they could be distributed. In Laffa camp, for example, piles of undistributed tents were left lying on the ground, while registered refugees were obliged to sleep in the open.

124. At the beginning of the emergency in Eritrea, there was considerable confusion regarding organizational responsibility for providing shelter. Originally the responsibility of UNDP, a number of other agencies, including the ICRC, UNICEF and various NGOs, also made shelter available. When responsibility passed to UNHCR, staff were hard-pressed to find solutions to the issue of shelter in the absence of tents or poles with which to support the plastic sheeting. One creative approach was suggested: the use of a combined plastic sheeting/wooden frame that could be used initially as emergency shelter and subsequently as the basis for a roof on a more permanent dwelling.

125. UNHCR's role in the shelter sector has emerged as an issue during many recent emergency operations. Given its importance, some means of ensuring a consistent UNHCR policy on the issue should be adopted. The details of this policy are beyond the ambit of this evaluation. However, elements of it would include having flexible and predictable solutions on hand for a variety of situations, obviating the need for inefficient and ad hoc approaches to be taken.

Logistics

126. During the Sudan/Eritrea emergency, UNHCR performed well in the logistics sector, with the Supply and Transport Section dispatching goods to the two affected countries in a timely and effective manner. One factor which facilitated this effective performance was the availability of large assistance stockpiles that were left over from the Kosovo emergency of 1999. This was evidently an exceptional situation, and is unlikely to recur.

127. Once in Sudan and Eritrea, the movement and distribution of goods has been unpredictable. UNHCR's difficulties in Sudan have been examined elsewhere in this report. In Eritrea, UNHCR provided its governmental counterpart with lorries for distribution purposes, and this arrangement appears to have worked effectively. At the start of the emergency, however, UNHCR was not always able to exercise its standard monitoring procedures, a situation that should be averted in future emergencies.

Leadership and coordination

In the Sudan/Eritrea emergency, UNHCR was not always able to meet the expectations placed upon it by other actors. When such expectations are unrealistic, or when there are circumstances that prevent UNHCR from providing effective leadership and coordination, the organization should be forthright in explaining its limitations.

128. According to its mission statement, UNHCR is mandated by the United Nations to lead and coordinate international action for the worldwide protection of refugees and the resolution of refugee problems. In the Sudan/Eritrea emergency, other actors acknowledged that role and looked to UNHCR to provide policy and operational leadership in relation to refugees, returnees and, to a lesser extent, IDPs.

129. For reasons both external and internal to the organization, UNHCR's performance in terms of leadership and coordination was not always optimal during the emergency. In Sudan, UNHCR was confronted with the partnership problem examined in an earlier section of this report. Unfortunately, as a result of the difficult relationship that developed between UNHCR and COR, for example, each organization chaired separate and overlapping sectoral coordination meetings at the beginning of the emergency.

130. The UN and non-governmental agencies involved in the operation urged UNHCR to address this issue and to merge the meetings. This was subsequently done, but UNHCR remained in an uncomfortable position – a lead agency that was unable to exert full control over its own resources and which was in a constant process of negotiation with its principal 'implementing partner'.

131. In Eritrea, NGOs were also vocal in urging UNHCR to assume a more clearly defined leadership role, especially with regard to repatriation. But the organization's ability to assume such a role was hampered by the fact that it had only recently re-established a presence in the country, and by uncertainty over the size of its budget. Given these constraints, UNHCR proceeded intelligently and creatively, establishing a constructive presence on various coordinating bodies and sectoral meetings.

132. In both countries, UNHCR's leadership role in relation to protection was exercised with greater clarity and success. In Eritrea, UNHCR was largely spared the complex protection and security problems encountered in other recent repatriation and IDP situations. In Sudan, UNHCR was aware of the problems associated with mixed groups of refugees, soldiers and other combatants, and took rapid action to resolve them.

133. The Sudan/Eritrea emergency provided a clear demonstration of the linkage between UNHCR's human resource strategies and its leadership role. If it is to coordinate other agencies, UNHCR must ensure the timely deployment of

technically qualified staff, who are able to provide sector-specific directives and evaluate project suitability and effectiveness. This was not always the case in the Sudan/Eritrea operation.

134. Other actors involved in the emergency assumed that UNHCR would take primary responsibility for the management of refugee camps (including the provision of shelter) and logistics - issues examined in more detail in the preceding chapter of this report. Of relevance to this discussion is the fact that the expectations placed upon UNHCR by some stakeholders – implementing partners, governments and displaced populations themselves – were sometimes excessive.

135. The independent evaluation of the Kosovo refugee crisis referred to the phenomenon in which UNHCR fails to meet unrealistic demands as an ‘expectations gap’. ‘UNHCR’, the review concluded, ‘has an obligation to clarify limitations related to its tasks and capacities’.²² The same recommendation arises from UNHCR’s experience in the Sudan/Eritrea emergency, and is especially true in a situation involving IDPs and other non-mandatory beneficiaries.

²² *The Kosovo Refugee Crisis*, xiv (emphasis in original).

Needs, resources and standards

If UNHCR is to meet the essential needs of its beneficiaries, it must budget accordingly and present those needs to donor states. In the Sudan/Eritrea emergency, budgets formulated in the field were reduced on the basis of anticipated donor responses, an approach which is likely to contribute to the problem of regional disparities.

136. The assessment of beneficiary needs, and the mobilization of resources to meet those needs, is a fundamental element of any emergency operation. In the case of the Sudan/Eritrea emergency, UNHCR's plans and programmes appear to have been based on the anticipated provision of funding by donor states, rather than the actual needs of the refugees, returnees and IDPs that the organization sought to assist.

137. This approach is an understandable one, given the highly uneven donor response to crises in different parts of the world during the past few years. Indeed, one of the reasons why UNHCR was able to meet the immediate needs of displaced people in Eritrea and Sudan was the availability of relief items from warehouses in Albania. Such items were leftovers from the Kosovo emergency, which was characterized by a surplus, rather than a shortage, of goods.

138. The resource rather than needs-based approach adopted by UNHCR in the Sudan/Eritrea emergency was linked to two other factors: the nature of emergency budget preparation, and the way in which donors are approached for funds.

139. Emergency budgets are of necessity prepared in a hurry, using approximate population statistics and uncertain timeframes. While speed and imprecision may be the essence of an emergency operation, budgets established in the field are liable to be cut if they are not based on a clear determination of the essential needs of a well-defined target population.

140. A recurring criticism of the budget formulation process in the Sudan/Eritrea emergency concerned the way in which such cuts were decided upon. Many of those staff members in the field who work hard on the preparation of budgets wondered who decided to cut them and how decisions were taken in relation to the anticipated donor response. The question of transparency between Headquarters and the field was frequently raised in this context.

141. A second and related issue concerns the way UNHCR interacts with donors, particularly the organization's apparent 'self-censorship' in presenting budgets. By its reluctance to confront donors with the full range of beneficiary needs that have to be met, the organization may actually be contributing to the problem of regional disparity. Significantly, donor states themselves recognize that this is happening. Thus in a recent interview, Julia Taft, the US Assistant Secretary of State (Population, Refugees and Migration) asserted that 'UNHCR ought to tell us what is really

needed and force the donors to say 'we can't afford that' rather than setting the standard to what you think donors will be willing to give'.²³

142. While there are no universal standards for emergency assistance, both the UNHCR *Emergency Handbook* and the *Sphere Project Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response* set minimum standards below which emergency assistance should not fall, and which UNHCR should strive to uphold.

143. Given that UNHCR had a mandatory role in relation Eritrean refugees and returnees, and a strong case for involvement with IDPs in Eritrea, the organization could have been more forceful than it was in presenting needs-based budgets, before embarking (perhaps inevitably) on a resource-limited operation.

²³ *Refugees* magazine, vol. 2, no. 119, 2000.

Maps

- 1: Sudan
- 2: Western Eritrea

UNHCR Mapping Unit

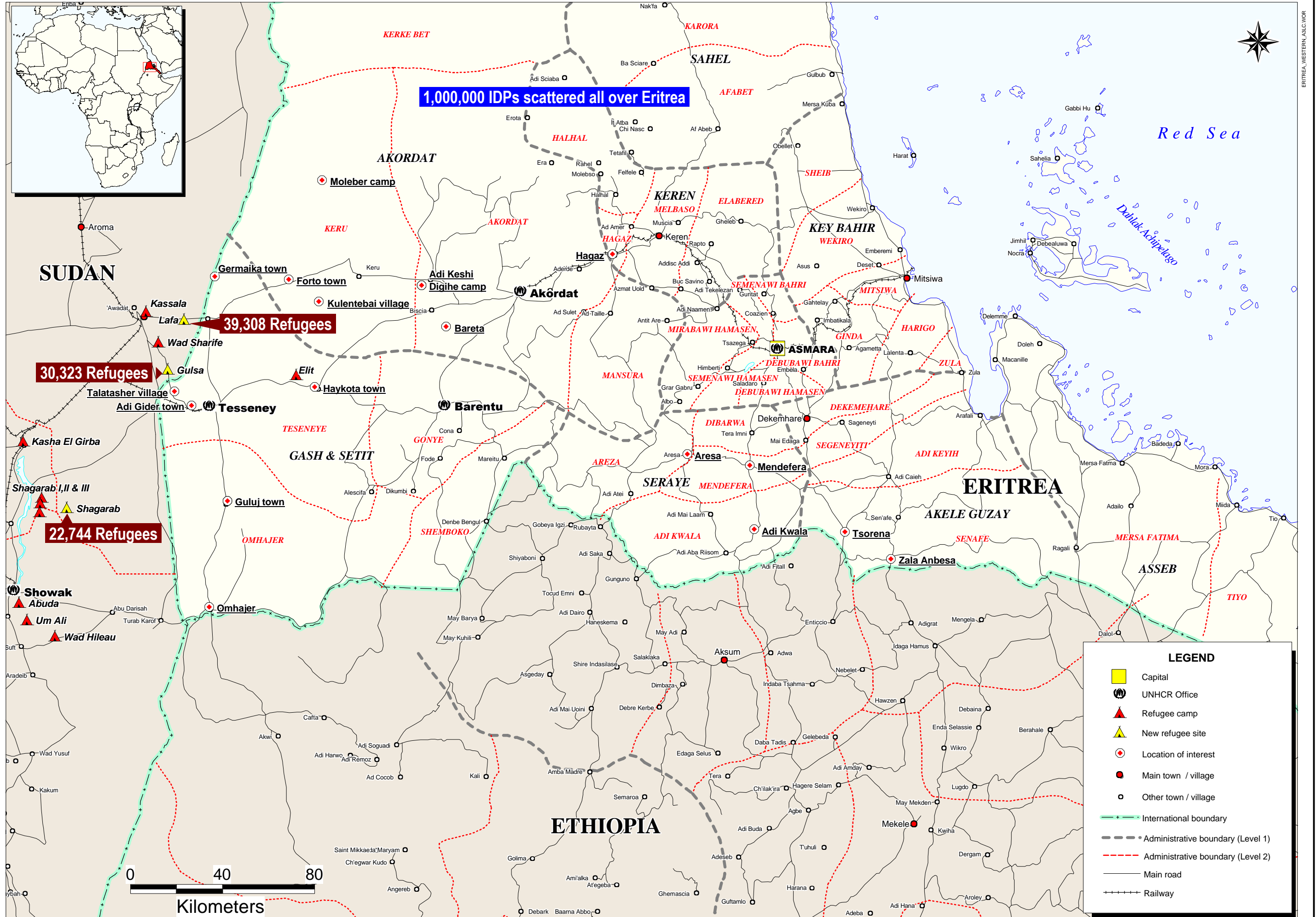


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SUDAN_GEN_LBPC.WOR

UNHCR Mapping Unit



1,000,000 IDPs scattered all over Eritrea

39,308 Refugees

30,323 Refugees

22,744 Refugees

Red Sea

SUDAN

ERITREA

ETHIOPIA

LEGEND

- Capital
- UNHCR Office
- Refugee camp
- New refugee site
- Location of interest
- Main town / village
- Other town / village
- International boundary
- Administrative boundary (Level 1)
- Administrative boundary (Level 2)
- Main road
- Railway

0 40 80

Kilometers

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ERITREA_WESTERN_ASJC_WOR