

**REVIEW OF UNHCR'S REHABILITATION ACTIVITIES IN THE GREAT LAKES**

**Inspection and Evaluation Service  
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**SCOPE OF THE REVIEW**

In the aftermath of the refugee emergency in the Great Lakes region of Africa, UNHCR launched major rehabilitation activities in the refugee-impacted areas of Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Tanzania. In order to examine the initial results, as well as document the experience and lessons learned from these efforts, the Inspection and Evaluation Service was requested to review rehabilitation activities in the region.

In carrying out the study, key documents were reviewed and in-depth discussions were held with those associated with activities in the region. Roy Herrmann, a UNHCR staff member seconded to IES carried out the basic research and field visits. During the visits, extensive discussions were held with the staff of UNHCR and other United Nations agencies, officials from the host and donor governments and the personnel of non-governmental agencies. Additional input to the final report was carried out by staff currently serving in the field, and final editing was provided by George Gordon-Lennox, a former UNHCR staff member. Information covering essentially all activities was collected and analysed during the review, but in the interest of brevity, only the information required to facilitate an analysis of major issues and support conclusions is provided.

**I. BACKGROUND**

1. The Great Lakes refugee emergency was of an intensity and scale almost unprecedented for UNHCR and the international community. UNHCR was stretched to the limit in the emergency relief phase and obliged to adopt a number of innovative approaches in its efforts to fulfil its mandate in the region.
2. By intervening directly to cushion the impact of refugees in asylum countries, UNHCR sought to stabilise conditions and reaffirm the pre-eminence of its protection mandate. At the same time, the Office tried to act as a catalyst to involve other UN agencies and NGOs to extend and support rehabilitation activities leading towards development. In a parallel but integrated effort, UNHCR adopted a community-based approach to the reintegration of returnees.
3. The three countries concerned – the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Tanzania and Burundi – offer three related, though different, experiences for UNHCR. In all three, UNHCR supported communal infrastructure, income-generating and capacity-building projects in an effort to remedy the direct and collateral damage caused by large refugee caseloads. In the Congo and Burundi, returnees were also assisted. A total of more than US\$40million had been invested in the three countries for this type of assistance between late 1996 and the first quarter of 1998.
4. The Expanded Humanitarian Programme (EHP) launched in late 1996 in the former Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo, DRC) was implemented despite a chaotic political and military situation. Through the EHP, UNHCR had hoped to establish a dialogue with the rebel Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (ADFL) forces. As fighting escalated and access to the refugee caseload became increasingly difficult, UNHCR had to deal both with the still recognised Mobutu Government and the Alliance, which was quickly becoming the *de facto* administration in the east of the country.
5. In Tanzania, rehabilitation activities continued despite the expulsion of half a million refugees. By early 1998, UNHCR had spent nearly US\$15 million (between 20% and 25% of the total annual country programme) in support to local government and NGOs for activities that extended beyond the direct assistance to refugees. UNHCR successfully acted as a catalyst to involve a number of other more development-oriented agencies in the programme.
6. In Burundi, where the Office was almost the sole channel of international assistance, UNHCR set up a variety of rehabilitation projects for 180,000 returnees, 100,000 displaced and a local population similarly affected by the long-lasting unrest. The projects, providing assistance to a mixed community facing malnutrition, low education levels, and insecurity, as well as the effects of the economic embargo, totalled US\$15 million in 1997, a budget that was cut by almost half in 1998.

## **II. SUMMARY**

7. The rehabilitation programmes in the Great Lakes were undertaken in a region in crisis, posing a number of challenges for UNHCR in its efforts to protect refugees and at the same time alleviate the impact of their presence on host countries. When the programme was launched in the then Eastern Zaire, civil war was imminent. Both in the DRC and Tanzania, UNHCR could not prevent massive expulsions of refugees. In Burundi, on the other hand, despite major tensions, the concerns of the Government and those of UNHCR coincided, and the Office was the main channel of humanitarian assistance.
8. The expulsions of refugees faced UNHCR with the dilemma of protecting the refugees and at the same time maintaining a dialogue with the authorities. It was

hoped that the rehabilitation programmes would serve this purpose through maintaining a vital field presence. Major staff resources were deployed for the rehabilitation operations, and the network of field officers had a life-saving function.

9. UNHCR's obligation to emphasise the link between its rehabilitation projects and its basic mandate was not always understood, but at the same time, the programme was sometimes perceived as taking precedence over refugee protection and assistance activities. By choosing to continue the programme despite an overtly hostile climate against the refugees, UNHCR ran the risk of losing credibility.

10. In the Great Lakes, UNHCR entered the realm of development when it repaired and rehabilitated the social infrastructure and forests damaged by the presence of refugees. UNHCR often acted as a substitute for public services, and it also assisted surrounding communities suffering from chronic under-development. UNHCR's implementation procedures were not, however, always adapted to development norms and UNHCR could not meet all the expectations of local authorities.

11. The programmes in the Great Lakes clearly demonstrated the need for rehabilitation efforts to be part of a comprehensive development strategy. Unfortunately, development programmes and agencies were limited or even non-existent in the target areas. The fact that UNHCR was seldom able to link up with other UN agencies illustrates the difficulty of focusing concerted action of the UN agencies in post-conflict situations.

12. In Tanzania, although the Government and UNHCR promoted involvement by other agencies at an early stage, UNHCR's role and objectives were not always clear, particularly at the district level. In the DRC, some local authorities complained when their "pet" projects were not chosen for UNHCR support. Clearly in complex operations with several objectives and various actors, there is a need for greater efforts to be made to explain UNHCR's mandate and objectives to beneficiary communities.

13. It is evident from the experience gained during the rehabilitation programme that a number of issues require attention. Among those highlighted during the review were the following :

- Many of the projects would have benefited substantially from linkages with longer-term programmes. Failing this, sustainability of UNHCR's input was not always ensured.
- There was often a lack of sufficient community involvement and longer-term perspectives that greater expertise in development approaches could have addressed.
- Infrastructure projects often failed to adequately involve the local populations.
- Although reforestation projects were effectively implemented, some experts believe natural regeneration would have addressed most of the needs.
- When other possibilities do not exist, UNHCR projects can nonetheless provide a limited form of development aid, particularly during a reintegration process.

### **III. RECOMMENDATIONS AND LESSONS**

14. The experience in the Great Lakes provides numerous lessons for UNHCR. A

summary of the review's main recommendations and lessons follows.

**15. Linking rehabilitation to the Mandate:** When UNHCR seeks to protect refugees in situations of tensions or internal strife, rehabilitation programmes can be used to introduce an element of stability. The network of field staff engaged in these activities can save lives through their presence. In its desire to be proactive and positive through these activities, UNHCR must nonetheless constantly reaffirm its basic mandate responsibilities. Induction training of emergency field staff must place particular emphasis on this principle.

**16. Building in sustainability:** The limited possibilities to interface with development programmes in post-conflict situations raise concerns regarding the sustainability of UNHCR's input. Many UNHCR rehabilitation projects would nonetheless benefit substantially from linkages with larger strategies and long-term programmes, with UNHCR subordinating its own efforts to those orchestrated by relevant ministries and those agencies with an extended presence in the targeted regions. Every effort must be made to create these linkages at the earliest possible moment.

**17. Adapting procedures to development norms:** UNHCR's short-term project implementation procedures are not necessarily adapted to development norms. This would require longer time-frames and more development expertise in planning the projects and disbursing the funds. UNHCR's rehabilitation activities should, whenever possible, be part of a comprehensive strategy, where the Office's role would be limited in time, after which more long-term development agencies would be expected to take the lead.

**18. Longer-term commitments:** When UNHCR is nevertheless obliged to retain the lead role, the time-frames for certain rehabilitation projects may have to be extended to permit detailed planning and devise viable implementing arrangements. This might mean substituting longer-term commitments, which could be funded under a trust fund format, for the smaller, QIP-like projects. In this type of project, direct, voluntary community involvement can open up longer-term perspectives, and give members of the community a sense of ownership.

**19. Linking up with other UN agencies:** There is a need for new mechanisms for initiating concerted action of the UN agencies and host governments at the earliest possible juncture in the continuum from refugee/returnee aid to development, particularly in a post-conflict situation. UNHCR's emergency staff in the field should be thoroughly briefed on the mandates and methodologies of other agencies.

**20. Timing the hand-over is vital:** If UNHCR waits until it is starting to think about phasing out of a programme, it will be difficult to convince sister agencies to take on the responsibility, particularly if UNHCR's objectives do not fit with their own plans. To the extent possible, UNHCR should work with host governments and development agencies in planning and implementing rehabilitation projects.

**21. Working with host governments:** Particular attention must be paid to working with the various levels of governmental authority in countries undergoing or having recently undergone the trauma of conflict and/or the massive influx of refugees. In operations with several objectives and various actors, special efforts must be made to explain UNHCR's mandate and objectives in beneficiary communities. Ideally, dialogue with the authorities on non-emergency projects should whenever possible be undertaken by an inter-agency team. UNHCR should also more systematically take into account the future usefulness to the local population of materials and equipment brought during the emergency

phase.

22. **Environmental impact of refugees:** The degree of impact of refugees on the host area may sometimes be over-estimated. Although reforestation can have a major impact, some experts believe natural regeneration could do part of the job. Environmental education, promoting fuel-efficiency and agro-forestry have proven to be effective follow-up programmes. This could be a theme for further reflection. UNHCR could also consider out-sourcing independent, quantitative analyses of several key refugee programmes. The results could serve to respond to complaints about the negative impact of refugees. The data obtained could also serve as a useful fund-raising tool with donors, helping to effectively target areas of discrepancy and need.

#### **IV. UNHCR'S REHABILITATION PROGRAMMES IN THE GREAT LAKES**

23. The concept of providing development aid to countries of asylum with large-scale refugee caseloads is not new – it has been attempted in various forms since at least the early 1980s. It is therefore not surprising that the massive Great Lakes emergency once again raised the issue of the need for the international community to assist asylum countries to offset the sudden impact of hundreds of thousands of refugees. Infrastructure was stretched beyond the limits, and environmental damage was considerable. There were also major discrepancies between refugee assistance levels and government services for nationals.

24. UNHCR and other agencies recognised at an early stage the potential for conflict and the need to offset the resulting tensions in neighbouring communities. To the extent that time and funding permitted, some parallel community support projects were already launched during the emergency phase, but it was only after large segments of the refugee population had left the camps, some repatriating voluntarily, others expelled, that the more intensive rehabilitation activities began in earnest.

25. UNHCR repaired and rehabilitated the social infrastructure and forests damaged by the presence of refugees. It also assisted surrounding communities suffering from chronic under-development. These efforts were generally appreciated at the grassroots level, but gave rise to mixed reactions in various quarters outside the communities themselves. When projects were continued despite the massive expulsions of refugees, the motivations of the Office were sometimes questioned.

#### **The dilemma of linking protection with rehabilitation**

26. The dilemma for UNHCR consisted of extending its protection to the refugees and at the same time maintaining a dialogue with the authorities. This was particularly evident in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where by choosing to continue the programme despite an overtly hostile climate against the refugees, UNHCR's unique role and credibility were at risk.

27. In the chaotic situation reigning in the Kivu provinces, UNHCR often acted as a substitute for public services. Major staff resources were deployed for the rehabilitation operations, and although some staff were inexperienced, the network of field officers formed a vital presence when refugees were threatened. In the final analysis, there can be no doubt that the decision to continue the programme despite expulsions, no matter how controversial it may have been, clearly was aimed at saving lives.

28. This dilemma also existed to a certain extent in Tanzania, where in 1996 the

Government felt it had no other option than to expel more than half a million refugees. In spite of this action, UNHCR and the international community continued to support major rehabilitation assistance. The decision to maintain the rehabilitation programme was a clear recognition of Tanzania's traditional hospitality to refugees and its role in the search for peace in the region.

29. Despite its desire to be proactive and positive through its rehabilitation activities, UNHCR was constantly obliged to reaffirm its basic protection responsibility. This was not always easy, particularly when the distinction between refugees and non-refugees was not always clear. In the Great Lakes, some implementing partners and government officials did not always seem to understand that while UNHCR was funding, for example, a school repair project, it was still primarily concerned with the protection and welfare of refugees.

30. Disappointments and misunderstandings in the field were inevitable. Given the highly-politicised nature of the refugee caseload and the hostility towards them existing in certain sectors, this is perhaps understandable. UNHCR was nonetheless caught between those who reacted negatively to UNHCR's insistence on its mandate responsibilities, and those who sometimes felt that the rehabilitation programme was taking precedence over the Office's fundamental protection and care and maintenance activities.

### **UNHCR entered the realm of development**

31. The types of rehabilitation activities undertaken by UNHCR in the three host-countries were, for the most part, very similar: rehabilitating, upgrading and even extending infrastructure (roads, water distribution networks etc.), reforestation and a diverse collection of small low-cost income-generating or production projects.

32. In so far as UNHCR's projects were not confined to simply repairing damage caused by refugees, they could be considered as being of a developmental nature. Although most of the projects were well-implemented and beneficial to the targeted communities, UNHCR's implementation procedures were not always adapted to development norms. This would have required longer time-frames and more development expertise in planning the projects and disbursing the funds.

33. Ideally, UNHCR's rehabilitation activities should have been part of a comprehensive strategy, where the Office's role would be limited to a period of perhaps a year, after which more long-term development agencies would be expected to take the lead. At the same time, UNHCR would have been in a position to rally support, sensitise donors and raise funds, acting as a catalyst for further activities. This could only have been achieved, however, if linkages had been incorporated as early as possible in the programme to ensure that an effective hand-over was viable, and sustainability was built-in.

34. In the case of the Great Lakes, however, the continuum was far from seamless, even if to a certain extent the strategy was effective in Tanzania. In the DRC, some donors were prepared to invest funds in a conflict- or refugee-impacted area, but were thwarted by local conditions and security or other restrictions on agency activities. For example, the European Union's DG8 was eager to extend its funding in the Kivu region in early 1998 but was prevented by the political situation.

### **Sustainability was major concern in all three programmes**

35. In all three countries, the lack of possibilities to interface with development programmes raised concerns regarding the sustainability of UNHCR's input.

Rehabilitation projects had to be put in place quickly to maintain a field presence while funding was still available. Other agencies were not always in a position to commit themselves to a joint effort at an early stage. Time did not always allow for detailed needs assessments, ranking priorities, within the targeted communities. The result was that UNHCR decided to focus for the most part on social infrastructure, which conforms easily to the general quick impact format and has the added advantage of high visibility.

36. Even this approach was fraught with the same difficulties which severely limited the presence and action of development agencies, particularly in the DRC. Project sites were often inaccessible for security and other reasons, co-ordination and communications problematic, partners sometimes weak and projects frequently delayed by circumstances beyond UNHCR's control.

37. Many of the projects would still have benefited substantially from linkages with larger strategies and long-term programmes, with UNHCR subordinating its own efforts to those orchestrated by relevant ministries and those agencies which did have an extended presence in the targeted regions. As it was, UNHCR often found itself in a situation where it could not meet all the expectations of local authorities.

38. Agencies which were not involved with project planning from the beginning were understandably reluctant to accept responsibility later for related inputs, such as training of technicians, or the maintenance of equipment. Even when other agencies had also raised funds for QIP-like projects alongside UNHCR's schools, clinics, or small-scale income-generating projects, they were usually implemented on an exceptional basis, not as part of the concerned agency's long-term development programmes.

39. Sustainability was an important concern in the case of Tanzania as well, given that the programme was being implemented in areas ranking as low-priority for development planning purposes. UNHCR made major inputs in terms of infrastructure, including important road-building and other similar projects, but it may not be possible to maintain momentum once the refugee programme comes to an end.

### **Community participation has often been overlooked**

40. Many of the projects used contractors and lacked the direct, voluntary community involvement which would have opened them up to longer-term perspectives, and given members of the community a sense of ownership. It will not be easy for development agencies to solicit voluntary work from these communities at a later stage if it wasn't required by UNHCR, or the contractors who used hired workers. This might have been avoided had it been possible to draw up these projects in an inter-agency context from the outset, using methodologies of experienced development agencies.

41. In the Great Lakes, it must be recognised that it was not always possible for hard-pressed field staff to focus fully on in-depth ground work with the beneficiary community. For example, due to lack of follow-up, some vitally important empowerment projects involving women seemed likely to have a limited impact; they would probably have been implemented differently by agencies specialising in development.

### **Longer time-frames may be necessary**

42. Thus the experience in the Great Lakes shows that the time-frames for certain rehabilitation projects may have to be extended to permit detailed

planning and devise viable implementing arrangements. This might mean substituting longer-term commitments, which could be funded under a trust fund format, for the smaller, QIP-like projects.

43. Although UNHCR's present annual programming format allows for multi-year planning, problems can arise if delays develop in the course of the project and further adjustments are required. As was observed in the Great Lakes, this may mean that activities must be postponed in the interest of proper project control, leading to disappointment on the part of the authorities.

### **Working with the authorities**

44. Indeed one of the major lessons to be drawn from the Great Lakes programme is the particular attention which must be paid to working with the various levels of government authority in countries undergoing or having recently undergone the trauma of conflict and/or the massive influx of refugees. UNHCR's operations are often located in remote regions, where even at the best of times, central government may have little relevance in the daily lives of the inhabitants. In such circumstances, the relationships and working arrangement with the authorities can be particularly complex.

45. This was particularly true in Eastern DRC, but also to a lesser degree in Tanzania. Indeed, in the case of ex-Zaire, central government control was entirely lacking during a critical period, and UNHCR had to deal with *de facto* authorities. It was not always easy in either country to reconcile UNHCR's operational priorities in the field with the concerns of capital-based ministries. In its efforts to field effective operations as quickly as possible, UNHCR may at times have been perceived as bypassing certain important government offices.

46. At the district level, on the other hand, authorities were sometimes lacking in long-term perspectives. Local authorities who saw vast amounts of money being spent for refugee relief may understandably have wanted funding for their pet "development" projects as well, no matter how unrealistic they may have been. On the other hand, in some cases, local officials had a more realistic view of what was required and feasible in their areas. Regardless of project merits, it was quite evident that rejecting proposals can create tensions and mistrust with local officials, and thus put UNHCR field staff in an awkward position.

47. In some instances in the Great Lakes, incentives were provided or civil servants' salaries topped up. This practice, although undoubtedly justified by the need to encourage co-operation, could suggest that protection can be bought and blur the issue of the obligation to respect the mandate and international instruments. Its use should be strictly limited, because once begun, it is awkward to stop or draw the line.

### **UNHCR was sometimes unjustly criticised**

48. UNHCR was sometimes unjustly criticised both for its choices and its motivations. In the DRC, for example, key policy-makers were focused on other issues, which tended to be geo-political and military rather than humanitarian. Criticisms of UNHCR were heard, but the positive work was rarely commented upon. These criticisms sometimes found their way into the international media.

49. It is clear that because of the particular nature of the caseload, the refugees of the mid-1990s did not always receive the same benevolent welcome as other groups in earlier decades. This negative reaction may in turn have had an impact on UNHCR's image among the media, politicians and the local population in the host countries. For example, UNHCR was sometimes blamed for the presence of



armed and other destabilising elements among the refugees. Such remarks severely affected the morale of some field staff, who also had to deal with frequent insinuations that the rehabilitation programmes were a form of reparation for an imagined partisan stance on the part of UNHCR.

### **UNHCR must take great pains to explain its role and objectives**

50. Other remarks by local government officials must be taken more seriously. For example, some complained that while they were informed of UNHCR's intention to repair, say a school, they were not always consulted for their opinion or advice. Local authorities in the DRC did not always agree with the Office's choice of implementing partners. UNHCR's project selection was sometimes described as too hasty. It must, however, be recognised that particularly in the DRC, local representatives of line ministries with whom UNHCR had to deal had little or no guidance from their capital.

51. In Tanzania, on the other hand, co-operation at the central level was in many ways exemplary, and could serve as a model for the future. The Government and UNHCR promoted involvement by other agencies at an early stage, although unfortunately not all projects envisaged by other agencies could be launched in the transitional phase. At district level, however, the relationship between UNHCR's role and concerns and those of other agencies was not always clear to local officials.

52. This highlights another important lesson to be drawn from the Great Lakes experience: in operations with several objectives and various actors, special efforts must be made to explain UNHCR's mandate and objectives in beneficiary communities. Ideally, dialogue with the authorities on non-emergency projects should whenever possible be undertaken by an inter-agency team.

53. A related issue concerns whether UNHCR should more systematically take into account the future usefulness to the local population of materials and equipment brought in during the emergency phase. In Tanzania, local officials were disappointed over the relatively low hand-over value of some of these items once the refugees had returned home. Of course it may well be that more durable materials were also more costly, a major factor in an emergency. The decision may also have been political, if for example, a water pipeline which could serve surrounding communities was considered to be too permanent.

### **Working within the UN System**

54. In the Great Lakes, however, opportunities for inter-agency collaboration were limited. There would seem to be a gap in operational capacity in the UN system as a whole, as well as in the NGO sector, when it comes to community empowerment projects, for example, such as QIPs or those sustaining local livelihoods. This applies particularly to "countries in special circumstances". Donors tend to define all this type of assistance under the heading of "development aid" which, in the cases of Burundi and or the Democratic Republic of the Congo, was in any case frozen.

55. UNHCR's extended involvement well illustrates the need for new mechanisms for initiating concerted action of the UN agencies and host governments at the earliest possible juncture in the continuum from refugee/returnee aid to development, particularly in a post-conflict situation. UNHCR should not fear losing its identity by assuming a catalytic role, even if other UN agencies and NGOs actually manage and implement the rehabilitation work.

56. UNHCR's emergency-driven imperatives in the Great Lakes did not, however,

always make it possible to take this need for complementarity into account. UNHCR's ability to implement projects quickly caused extreme pressure and dependency on the Office. The problem was compounded where a logical interface in the emergency phase was not naturally apparent. In addition, emergency staff in the field were not always well briefed on the mandates and methodologies of other agencies.

57. UNHCR responded rapidly and on an *ad hoc* basis to requests for project funding from agencies and personalities it knew to be effective, without being able to take the time to develop a long-term strategy or plan of action. At the same time the Office had to deal with government officials who often felt more comfortable working with development agencies, precisely because they preferred their methods of joint planning in the framework of multi-year cycles.

58. In the post-emergency phase, while there was an apparent desire on the part of some sister agencies to participate, their field representatives were often unable to commit to written documents, and tended to be caught up in their own priorities. In addition, it was clearly more difficult for the development-type agencies to raise funds for activities linked with a refugee programme which went beyond their normal multi-year plans.

59. A lesson can be drawn with regard to the timing of the approach. If UNHCR waits until it is starting to think about phasing out of a programme, it may be difficult to convince sister agencies to take on the responsibility, particularly if UNHCR's objectives do not fit in with their own plans. At best, they may agree to expedite or extend the implementation of a national programme, such as the UNDP's Sustainable Human Development or UNICEF's Child Survival and Develop Protection programmes, to refugee-impacted areas ahead of the plan schedule.

60. On the other hand, host governments and development agencies should not have to wait until UNHCR is in a position to hand over. It is easy for donors to justify support to UNHCR and its partners in refugee emergencies because the needs are apparent and immediate. Once an emergency has ended, however, attention generally shifts and different criteria are applied to determine priorities. At a time when competition for funding is fiercer than ever, many donors, it would seem, would rather invest in long-term capacity-building and bolstering economic growth, investments which show a return, than in extended humanitarian operations.

### **Environmental impact may sometimes be over-estimated, but by and large reforestation was effective**

61. Another issue in all three countries which could be a theme for further reflection concerns the degree to which the impact of refugees on the host area may in certain instances have been over-estimated. For example, although reforestation had a major impact, some experts believe natural regeneration could have done part of the job. On the positive side, environmental education, promoting fuel-efficiency and agro-forestry has proven to be an effective follow-up programme.

62. The environmental impact of refugees is nevertheless obvious. It should also be recognised, however, that while complaints against refugees are a regular feature in many host countries, refugee assistance can also impact positively on host areas. By out-sourcing independent, quantitative analyses of several key refugee programmes, UNHCR could respond to such complaints against refugees. The data obtained could also serve as a useful fund-raising tool with donors, helping to effectively target areas of discrepancy and need.

## **Lessons were learned in the region**

63. Obviously any infrastructure work done in war-torn or neglected areas will have some positive impact. UNHCR's rehabilitation projects on the whole were well executed and have made a considerable contribution to stabilising the situation in the region. Projects aimed at reintegrating returnees hopefully will hold them in place and avoid creating a new problem of internally displaced persons. This being said, it is also to be hoped that the following lessons learned from the rehabilitation programmes in the Great Lakes will be of use to UNHCR and the international community in finding new approaches to helping host countries to bear the refugee burden.

64. UNHCR's presence can be an element of stability when, as is the case more and more frequently, refugee-impacted countries are in situations of conflict or post-conflict. In such circumstances, the input of the national authorities may be severely limited or even non-existent, and the action of the international agencies drastically restricted or even impossible. Maintaining a UNHCR presence through rehabilitation projects may not suffice to guarantee protection of a highly-politicised refugee caseload. Such activities can, on the other hand, provide the indispensable element of stability to hold a returnee population in place and avoid creation of a new problem of internally displaced persons.

65. Rehabilitation projects should not, however, overshadow the mandate. UNHCR's protection function requires a strong presence in the field. Rehabilitation programmes such as those in the Great Lakes will undoubtedly give the Office a high profile, but such non-mandate activities should not overshadow core mandate concerns. UNHCR field staff should therefore be thoroughly briefed on the mandates, operational principles and operational capacities of sister UN system agencies and major development-oriented NGOs, and encouraged to seek their involvement at the earliest possible juncture.

66. Local populations bear a major part of the refugee burden, and they must be helped from the very beginnings of a refugee emergency. When UNHCR acts to strengthen local institutions such as schools and hospitals and repair or extend road networks and water distribution systems in the refugee-impacted area, this assistance benefits local populations as well as the refugees themselves. It should always be aimed at avoiding discrepancies which may otherwise turn host governments and the national population against the refugees and the humanitarian organisations assisting them.

67. While UNHCR clearly has an obligation to assist asylum states to cope with the impact of massive refugee or returnee populations, rehabilitation efforts should whenever possible be part of a broader strategy. Such a strategy should, whenever possible, be developed by UNHCR together with host governments, donors and other international agencies, in the spirit of the "continuum from refugee aid to development".

68. The developmental character of rehabilitation assistance requires that such partnerships be aimed at ensuring longer-term sustainability of the projects. Beyond the emergency phase, extended UNHCR activities linked to rehabilitation programmes, although they may have the effect of fostering goodwill, must be considered independently. Normally needs assessments should always be carried out by an inter-agency team. In addition, to avoid inertia leading to continuation of these activities by UNHCR year after year, a clear phase-out period, agreed with other agencies and key donors, should be fixed from the outset.

69. Rehabilitation projects must follow strict criteria, and the particular technical circumstances of each project, including the indispensable element of sustainability, must be given due consideration. They must also be planned and structured with viable targets based on realistic funding availability. UNHCR should encourage central ministries to fit UNHCR's contribution into their own plans, in co-ordination with local counterparts and administrators. These plans will almost always include development co-operation with other agencies. When necessary, UNHCR's central focal point in the government should be called upon to reconcile the different governmental, inter-governmental and non-governmental parties, smoothing the way for UNHCR and clarifying the Office's role in refugee programmes.

70. Rehabilitation programmes need flexible funding, and time-frames may have to be extended to permit reasonable planning and to devise viable implementing arrangements. In such conditions, and when UNHCR is for various reasons required to retain the lead role, this could involve shifting away from smaller, more compact QIP-like projects, and soliciting contributions under a trust fund format. Although the present annual programming format allows for multi-year planning, problems arise where inevitable delays develop in the course of the project, which, in turn, require further adjustments. Consequently, activities are often postponed in the interest of proper project control. Such adjustments must be clearly explained to the authorities.

71. The degree of impact of refugees on the environment of the host area may sometimes be over-estimated. Although reforestation can have a major impact, some experts believe natural regeneration could do part of the job. Environmental education, promoting fuel-efficiency and agro-forestry has proven to be an effective follow-up programme. This could be a theme for further reflection. UNHCR could also consider out-sourcing independent, quantitative analyses of several key refugee programmes. The results could serve to respond to complaints about the negative impact of refugees. The data obtained could also serve as a useful fund-raising tool with donors, helping to effectively target areas of discrepancy and need.

## V. CASE STUDIES

### Democratic Republic of the Congo

#### **Summary of observations**

- UNHCR sought through rehabilitation assistance to establish a dialogue on protection with rebel forces. The Office had to deal with both *de facto* and *de jure* authorities, and was unable to prevent forced repatriations. The decision to continue the programme despite expulsions was controversial, but clearly saved lives.
- Through EHP, UNHCR often acted as a substitute for public services. The projects included both traditional UNHCR rehabilitation activities and "compensation" projects justifying a presence, but were not part of a development strategy.
- Major staff resources were deployed for the rehabilitation assistance operations, although some staff were inexperienced. The network of field staff had a life-saving function when refugees were threatened. On the other hand, a vacant protection officer post went unfilled for almost a year, thus weakening the extent to which protection efforts were supported through rehabilitation efforts.
- Project sites were often inaccessible, and co-ordination and communications problematic, partners were sometimes weak and projects

often delayed by circumstances beyond UNHCR's control.

- Facing conflicting pressures, UNHCR's project selection was sometimes criticised as too hasty. Furthermore, local authorities did not always agree with the Office's choice of implementing partners. Although UNHCR often included local NGOs, it tended to favour international NGOs.
- Many of the projects lacked sufficient community involvement and longer-term perspectives. Small economic/production projects had mixed results and might have been implemented differently by agencies specialising in development.

## **Introduction**

72. The Expanded Humanitarian Programme (EHP) launched in late 1996 aimed at rehabilitating refugee-affected areas of North and South Kivu in the former Zaire. Through the programme, UNHCR sought to establish a dialogue with the rebel Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (ADFL), which was quickly becoming the *de facto* administration in the east of the country.

73. The difficulties were enormous: escalating fighting in the Kivus made access to the refugee caseload increasingly difficult, and UNHCR had to deal both with the still-recognised Mobutu Government and the Alliance. Repatriation, both voluntary under UNHCR's auspices and outside the Office's control, was proceeding apace, and refugee camps were rapidly emptying. Rehabilitation of refugee-affected areas was therefore justified not only by the major damage caused by such massive movements of people, but also by the severe protection dilemma facing UNHCR.

74. Funding originally destined for refugee assistance became available for rehabilitation and other activities. It was also hoped that these activities, would promote contacts with senior Alliance officials and would facilitate access to the remaining refugees, thus contributing to their protection. In the early days of the operation these contacts functioned well, but gradually the relationship evolved from co-operation to confrontation as the ADFL's pursuit of armed ex-FAR and Interahamwe took precedence over its relations with UNHCR and its mandate concerns.

## **When Conventions don't Work**

75. In September 1997, the new ADFL-controlled the DRC Government began expelling Rwandan and Burundi refugees from Kisangani and UNHCR was obliged to close its regional base at Goma. Major protection concerns prompted the High Commissioner to partially suspend rehabilitation programmes under the EHP, but UNHCR still continued to implement the remaining projects from the sub-office in Bukavu (South Kivu).

76. The decision to continue with EHP in South Kivu was controversial, but under the circumstances it is unlikely that the Office had any other realistic option. UNHCR's efforts were aimed at saving lives, while the ADFL had basically military objectives. UNHCR officials involved at the time, as well as the assistance community at large, are convinced that without maintaining the field network linked to EHP, UNHCR would not have been able to evacuate the remaining Rwandan refugees.

## **Major human resources were deployed, but protection staff was lacking**

77. UNHCR assigned nine international and 15 national technical staff to design, monitor, supervise, co-ordinate and assess each project. The relative

inexperience of some staff was more than compensated by their dedication in extremely difficult conditions. Greater knowledge of the roles and mandates of other agencies might, however, have contributed to a more effective interface with development programmes. Another staffing issue is illustrated by the fact that a protection officer post in the Bukavu sub-office could not be filled for nearly a year. Thus one of the major justifications for maintaining the EHP would seem to have been somewhat undermined.

78. Taking into account the extremely complex and often dangerous working environment, it is noteworthy that project implementation proceeded as smoothly as it did, specially before the events of September 1997. More than 500 projects were implemented by more than 50 local NGOs, 10 international NGOs, public institutions, and private contractors. The EHP covered virtually all sectors, including water, sanitation, infrastructure, health, education, fisheries, animal husbandry, agriculture and forestry. The individual cost of projects ranged from a few thousand dollars to several hundred thousand dollars.

79. UNHCR projects were of three types: first, traditional UNHCR rehabilitation activities included repairs to refugee-damaged schools and health centres, and the extension of refugee camp water supply systems to local populations; second, less traditional projects, such as rural road and bridge repair, mostly benefited local communities but also helped facilitate other activities such as repatriation; and third, projects designed to compensate the region for bearing the refugee burden.

80. In the latter category, works such as the construction of new town markets and urban road repairs were popular and high profile projects that would benefit a large proportion of the local population. They justified the presence of UNHCR in the region and enabled it to continue repatriation and protection activities. In South Kivu, a parallel series of projects was aimed at receiving 60,000 repatriating refugees who had fled ex-Zaire into Burundi and Tanzania. Into 1998, over US\$18 million had been invested through EHP.

### **UNHCR projects were designed to bridge a gap in public services**

81. EHP was designed to link with development agencies, but for the most part neither they nor the Government were ready to take over. The EHP went a long way towards meeting the basic humanitarian needs in a region suffering from damaged infrastructure, population displacements and widespread interruption of economic activities and public services. In the early stages, UNHCR staff fulfilled in many ways the role of public service officers by identifying and implementing projects in various technical sectors.

82. Short-term activities initiated by UNHCR were designed to serve as a bridge to longer-term developmental activities that other UN agencies and state services could later assume. By the end of 1997, some progress had been made in a few sectors with Government funding commencing for specific projects. In other areas such as rural water supply and urban sanitation, however, neither the Government nor other UN agencies were in a position to continue the rehabilitation effort.

### **Unanticipated difficulties hampered implementation**

83. A number of difficulties and unexpected hurdles had to be overcome to implement the rehabilitation projects. Rural sites were often inaccessible due to insecurity or other factors including heavy rains. Some areas were closed for much of the year while in others access was sporadic. The lack of management and technical capacity in local NGOs and contractors was another limiting factor.

In addition, many partners relied on advances of funds before projects could start. Thus, when there were difficulties in arranging agreements and payments were slow, delays often resulted.

84. Other unpredictable constraints often interrupted project plans. For example, a delayed rainy season interrupted the seasonal agricultural calendar and periodic cement shortages caused numerous delays. Shortages of staff and decisions to suspend planned projects further complicated overall management of the rehabilitation programme. Consequently a few 1997 projects were only completed in early 1998, and the budget for 1998 was reduced to US\$7 million.

85. Co-ordination was a constant problem given the distances involved, unreliable or incomplete communications systems, shifting centres of concern and the difficulty of accessing key decision-makers. Working under such circumstances affected UNHCR's efficiency, causing increased costs and sapping staff morale. Security problems meant keeping staff on standby and losses of momentum, while materials became even more difficult to procure locally.

### **A remarkable achievement, although UNHCR was sometimes criticised**

86. In the face of such constraints, the lack of strong local government institutions and the need for UNHCR to adapt rapidly to changed circumstances, what was accomplished was little short of remarkable. The projects were usually well appreciated locally, and although they perhaps should not serve as a model for any subsequent operation, a number of important lessons can be drawn from them.

87. One example demonstrated by the operation in the DRC is the difficulty of satisfying all concerned, whether they be the local authorities, representatives of other agencies, or the beneficiaries themselves. This is particularly true when field operations are far removed from central governments, or if lines of authority are not clear, as was the case in the Kivus. UNHCR was constantly facing conflicting pressures over which type of projects to favour from an overwhelming number of submissions, and UNHCR was criticised by local authorities for allegedly overly hasty project selection and insufficient consultations with relevant officials.

88. In the circumstances, UNHCR had few options. Consultations were for the most part with the representatives of the line departments, whose staff and offices remained relatively intact despite the change in the central government, but who lacked direction. ADFL authorities were also consulted, but although the Alliance was considering setting development and rehabilitation priorities, it was apparently not yet fully prepared for the task. UNHCR programme and technical units also conducted a separate (and largely independent) evaluation of virtually all project proposals, and as a result, many of the weakest were rejected.

89. Local officials were also critical of UNHCR's preference for communal projects over those benefiting individuals. At the same time, the new Government in Kinshasa was pressing for big projects which went beyond both UNHCR's means and mandate. According to UNHCR staff, there were also cases where officials had vested interests and tried to influence selection on certain projects.

90. Another cause of friction was UNHCR's choice of implementing partners, which was not always understood or appreciated by local authorities. UNHCR worked mainly with international NGOs, but also with numerous local agencies. The latter were sometimes over-extended, however, and international NGOs had to fill the gaps. It was perhaps inevitable in such a context that there would be

some unhappy parties.

### **Time constraints limited community participation**

91. The works undertaken were generally of a high technical quality, but costs were greater than might have been the case if development methods and criteria could have been used. For example, local officials point to the self-help approaches used for school rehabilitation, which allowed one agency to rehabilitate rural schools much more quickly and at a lower cost than UNHCR. Concerned staff stress, however, that the basic assumptions are quite different, and that many major projects could not have been carried out by self-help.

92. It is nevertheless clear that the dynamic of community participation was often under-utilised in UNHCR's EHP projects, even though certain sectors, such as afforestation, did involve the local population. The level of community organisation tends to be lower in the Congo than in other country programmes where the concept of Quick Impact Projects has been used. While this makes community-generated and -run projects more difficult to pursue successfully, the extra effort involved would have been amply justified, because beyond the actual infrastructure improvements there would have been a value added in the process.

### **Rehabilitation combined with preparing for repatriation**

93. The programme in the Uvira area designed to support the repatriation of 60,000 Congolese refugees from Tanzania illustrates how rehabilitation can be combined with other objectives linked to UNHCR's mandate. As such, it was a good justification for continuing UNHCR's efforts under EHP. The bulk of the work undertaken for the repatriation was linked to transportation needs, grading of roads, repair of essential bridges and quays where the ferries discharged returnees. Social infrastructure that was damaged during the war was also rehabilitated, consistent with UNHCR's policy of promoting and facilitating reintegration.

94. A series of small-scale economic production projects launched under EHP and mostly implemented by local NGOs, were common to both the activities aimed at repairing refugee-impacted areas and those aimed at reintegrating returnees. A problem with this type of project, frequently faced elsewhere by UNHCR, was the difficulty of identifying and developing viable activities that could survive under difficult conditions. It is therefore not surprising that some were more successful than others.

95. A lesson to be learned from this experience is that there is no single recipe for success, but that they must be carefully adapted to prevailing circumstances. Some projects may work out well because of the marketability of the product, or the fact that an unmet need is identified. Other positive factors can include use of readily accessible technology which can be transferred simply to a large number of beneficiaries, or the fact that the climate and environment are favourable to certain types of activity.

### **Time-frames limit development potential**

96. While the costs to UNHCR of the EHP small-scale economic/production projects may have been relatively low, other agencies with a developmental orientation might have had a different, more methodical approach. UNHCR's tight time-frames tend to reduce the likelihood for success, particularly considering that the local NGOs enlisted as partners are likely to have limited supervisory capacity over a longer period of time. In general it may be said that although a number of Congolese families may be better off as a result of these projects, their



longer-term impact will probably be far less than if development agencies had been involved.

97. One example is a fisheries project, which could have been more successful and reached a larger number of potential beneficiaries if it had been spread over a period of several years and linked with an agency such as FAO, which has extensive fisheries experience. As it stands, there is a risk that only the most skilful among the target-group will benefit to the maximum extent possible, while the more handicapped will probably remain marginalised.

### ***Summary of projects in Congo***

**Agriculture:** Projects included distribution of tons of seeds, several thousand tools, and major support to national agricultural research institutes at Bukavu and Goma for improved seed production. These projects included the opening of 6,000 m of field access roads, construction of storage and drying facilities, purchase of base seeds, repairs to machinery and additional management support. In 1998, the Congolese returnees in the Uvira/Baraka region benefited from a programme designed to achieve self-sufficiency through distribution of seeds and monitoring of their cultivation.

**Education:** Projects in this sector principally focused on the rehabilitation of 55 refugee-affected school sites and the supply of school desks for 5,000 students. Projects ranged from minor repairs to selected primary schools, to a complete reconstruction of a bombed educational institute in Goma. Implementation arrangements: COOPI (Cooperazione Internazionale Italiana); budget for 1998: US\$760,000.

**Environment:** The principal focus of projects in this sector was the reforestation of 2,500 ha of refugee camp sites and surrounding affected areas. Approximately three million seedlings were raised and planted through the support of 100 small local nurseries. An agro-forestry project was also financed for production of seeds and education. With support from the Japanese Trust Fund, two additional projects were co-ordinated for the protection of mountain gorillas in the Virunga National Park near Goma and the eastern lowland gorillas of Kahuzi-Biega National Park near Bukavu (continued in 1998).

**Community Services:** Numerous small practical projects including sewing, tanning, grain milling, oil pressing and small animal husbandry activities, with relevant training, were undertaken under this sector. Projects aimed to assist vulnerable groups, such as adolescents and widows, to become more self-sufficient. Also included was support to existing artisan groups, a co-operative canteen and general timely assistance to displaced persons and other vulnerable persons as required.

**Fisheries:** In Uvira, comprehensive projects to support local fishing co-operatives on Lake Tanganyika were undertaken. Activities included supply of nets, lamps, ropes and boat repair kits. A few outboard motors were purchased to aid fishing groups to fish deeper areas of the lake. Port areas were cleaned and latrines constructed.

**Health/Nutrition:** This sector included the physical rehabilitation of 18 health centres, construction of an operating theatre in Bukavu, as well as significant work on Uvira and Goma general hospitals, including supply of surgical and laboratory equipment. Rehabilitation of buildings and stocking of essential drugs to the value of US\$ 900,000 in three "Central Pharmacies" in Goma, Bukavu and Uvira was achieved. Further activities included supplies to nutritional centres,

support to AIDS and tuberculosis programmes, blood banks and a epidemiological surveillance unit, 12 training sessions of health staff and general support to Provincial Health Inspection authorities including supply of computers and office equipment. In 1998, a consolidation of 1997 projects supporting major medical programmes was undertaken in Bukavu and in Uvira, and a health centre and maternity centre were rehabilitated and extended in the Baraka zone for returnees from Tanzania.

**Infrastructure:** Principal activities under this sector included the construction of five slaughterhouses and seven markets with large covered pavilions, pavement, drainage, locked storage and sanitation facilities. Replacement of three high tension pylons and transformers and repair to main electrical lines benefited 200,000 people in Goma and 150,000 in Uvira. The telephone system in Bukavu town was repaired, some public buildings were also included, and material support to the volcano surveillance observatory in Goma was provided. This activity continued in 1998 in Uvira with the rehabilitation of structures hosting the new refugees in Kiliba.

**Livestock and Animal Husbandry:** Supply of animal vaccines and support of veterinary pharmacies was included under this sector with some medium-sized community-managed animal husbandry projects. Some projects were undertaken in association with rural health centres in the interest of improving community nutritional levels.

**Sanitation:** The priority for this sector was the cleaning and closing of all 40 refugee camp sites – an area of 2,500 ha. Activities included removal and burying of solid wastes and several thousand bodies and filling of more than 40,000 latrine pits and 12 km of drainage trenches. This exercise was especially difficult in the Goma area during early 1997, where the large number of corpses posed a serious public health threat, as extreme ground conditions (sharp fissured volcanic rock) inhibited proper burial. Ongoing combat in the area and the presence of land mines and live ammunitions in the camps further complicated activities. Urban solid waste management was also undertaken in Bukavu and Goma towns as well as public hygiene education work with local authorities and communities. In the Uvira/Baraka region, Quick Impact Projects were also completed in 1998.

**Transport:** Many major projects were undertaken in this sector. They included: the rehabilitation of two major urban roads; over 150 km of rural road works; repairs to more than 40 bridges; reconstruction and cleaning of drainage systems; and erosion control projects involving stone and wire mesh-reinforced embankments and river protection works. The implementation of some of these projects in Bukavu and Uvira continued in 1998.

**Water Supply:** Projects in this sector focused on the re-use of water supply equipment from abandoned refugee camps to construct 39 sustainable gravity-fed village water schemes in surrounding "refugee affected" areas. In addition, support to the urban water supply authority in Goma with water tankers to transport and distribute more than 20,000 m<sup>3</sup> of potable water was organised with supply of pumps, generators and 20 tonnes of water treatment chemicals. In Uvira, the same type of activity was continued in 1998 in the Fizi-Baraka area, where returnees from Tanzania were accommodated.

#### The Republic of Tanzania

#### **Summary of observations**

- Tanzania's traditional hospitality to refugees may have been taken for

granted, but it was impossible to foresee or prevent the pressures leading to the massive expulsion of Rwandan refugees. UNHCR and the international community continued rehabilitation assistance, repairing damage, providing relief to the remaining refugees, and maintaining preparedness.

- The Government and UNHCR promoted the involvement of other agencies at an early stage, in the spirit of the "continuum". Although not all projects envisaged by sister agencies could be launched in the transitional phase, co-operation was exemplary, and could serve as a model for such efforts in the future.
- In operations with several objectives and various actors, special efforts must be made to explain UNHCR's role and mandate, and those of other agencies, in beneficiary communities.
- Reafforestation had a major impact, although some experts believe natural regeneration could have done part of the job. Environmental education, promoting fuel-efficiency and agro-forestry is an effective follow-up programme. In refugee-prone regions, joint contingency plans might minimise the environmental impact of future influxes.
- The sustainability of activities intended to carry on after UNHCR withdraws is an important concern. Maintaining the momentum of projects in remote, low-priority regions will continue to be problematic. Nonetheless, UNHCR can often have a longer-term impact by using relief materials suitable for national use when it is not considered too costly or permanent.

## **Introduction**

98. Since independence, Tanzania has been remarkable in its accessibility and openness to refugees. It had already over a period of years integrated large numbers of refugees from neighbouring countries and was an active promoter of peace in the region. During this long history of humanitarian co-operation, a special relationship with UNHCR developed, and the hospitality accorded in 1994 to massive numbers of refugees from Rwanda during the Great Lakes emergency reconfirmed this tradition.

99. The Government's decision to expel more than half a million refugees in 1996 therefore came as a surprise to all concerned. Prior to the Great Lakes emergency, the international community may indeed have been inclined to take Tanzania's hospitality to refugees for granted. In the rush to organise emergency assistance, it is possible that neither the Office nor the Government sufficiently recognised the particular, highly-politicised character of the refugees.

100. Clearly, however, the fact that Tanzania felt it had no other option cannot be linked to any lack of international assistance, despite speculation to that effect in some quarters. More probably the decision was an expression of extreme frustration at the international community's inability to effectively address the crisis. It is nevertheless this background that the Office found itself engaged in a major programme of rehabilitation of the refugee-impacted regions of Western Tanzania when the vast majority of the refugees had returned home.

101. In the ensuing period, UNHCR, with the backing of donors, went ahead with a number of projects aimed at environmental rehabilitation, institutional support and capacity building of government institutions in the refugee-affected areas. Similar projects were also implemented in areas where refugees from former Zaire and Burundi had arrived in October 1996.

102. UNHCR assistance had three objectives: first, to repair the damage done to

the environment, physical and social infrastructure; second, to continue support to the local population and the Government of Tanzania while refugees remained; and third, to maintain preparedness to receive possible new refugee groups. By mid-1998, UNHCR had spent nearly US\$15 million (between 20% and 25% of the total annual country programme) in support to local governments and NGOs for activities that extended beyond the direct assistance to refugees, including nearly US\$3.5 million for support for security.

### **The International Community Joins Forces**

103. The UNHCR representative in Dar Es Salaam was active in promoting the idea of a programme which could be supported by international organisations and donors, involving the UN system and NGOs in an effort to offset the impact of the large refugee populations. As an indirect result, nearly US\$30 million had already been pledged by potential donors in response to a rehabilitation plan presented by the Office of the Prime Minister early in 1995.

104. UNHCR had thus played a major catalytic role in generating support for what could be considered a model for future agency collaboration in the region, and even though not all of the funds materialised, activities went ahead more or less as planned. UNHCR, in the process, gradually handed over some of its responsibilities to more specialised agencies.

105. New ground was being broken, and it is not surprising that those involved – UNHCR staff on the one hand, agencies on the other – were not always in agreement as to how fast this process should go. Some staff felt UNHCR would lose its identity by handing over too soon, while certain development agencies hoped to take over even more quickly than was envisaged by UNHCR in its lead role for the refugee emergency.

106. The experience in Tanzania still demonstrates that fund-raising for a co-operative effort involving other agencies is greatly facilitated by initiating the rehabilitation phase relatively early in the refugee programme. It is unlikely that UNHCR could have initiated and administered such an undertaking on its own.

107. The fact that the UN agencies and NGOs were working in concert was undoubtedly part of the appeal for the donors. Nor were UNHCR's primary refugee activities significantly affected by the rehabilitation programme, thus reducing the need for more staff and funding. Over the past two years UNHCR and other agencies have been able to implement a broad spectrum of projects that would probably not have been considered had not the refugee programme existed. District plans were updated in 1997 and serve as a basic catalogue of projects identified by the government.

### **UNHCR's role and mandate not always clear in beneficiary communities**

108. A number of lessons may nonetheless be drawn from this experience. While the vast majority of the projects were well implemented technically, for example, UNHCR's role and objectives in this common endeavour were not always well understood by local authorities. Clearly a programme of such dimensions and complexity, with a variety of objectives and involving various actors, would require special efforts to carefully explain mandates and operational priorities to all concerned at every level, specially at the grass roots.

109. The continued investment by UNHCR in these refugee-affected areas is amply justified as compensation to the local communities for the burden imposed on them by the presence of such large numbers of refugees. With time, however, the most direct linkages to the presence of refugees have dimmed, programmes

have expanded and the reasons for UNHCR's involvement have become less apparent.

## **Refugees and the Environment**

110. There has been considerable discussion concerning the degree of impact of refugees on the environment and deforestation, including in Tanzania. In the view of some experts, natural regeneration could have remedied much of the damage caused by the refugees. On the other hand, in the Great Lakes in general and Tanzania in particular, reforestation has been one area of activity where funding has not been a problem.

111. A major collateral benefit of the reforestation projects has been in heightening awareness of local communities that were employed in the work. As a result, the related projects could be used as models for future refugee situations. In Tanzania, tree-planting was linked to education of refugees and the local residents, including protection of the environment through promotion of fuel-efficient stoves, and the introduction of agro-forestry.

112. It would still be important for the future for UNHCR to give further consideration to the issue of tree-planting as opposed to other less costly measures. Although the replanting exercises were generally well implemented, the survival rate of seedlings in Tanzania was below what is generally expected. Senior UNHCR officials might therefore be well advised to carefully review the matter in Tanzania and elsewhere in relation to other issues such as land use practices and agricultural labour by refugees.

113. One possible strategy which has been discussed with a view to minimising the environmental impact of future refugee influxes would be for UNHCR and potential host governments to draw up a joint strategic contingency site plan. In the case of Tanzania, however, the Government has rejected such an approach because it could appear to be an invitation for further refugees. It has also been debated in this context whether it might not be preferable in future to locate refugees in settlements which could eventually function as self-supporting communities, rather than in wholly dependent camps.

## **Sustainability is an important concern**

114. The issue of sustainability of the separate, QIP-like projects which are a feature of the rehabilitation programme in Tanzania needs to be carefully evaluated. Such projects are the simplest and easiest format for UNHCR to implement, are relatively straightforward to support and monitor, and identification is apparent. The issue is how to ensure follow-up and linkage to longer-term, development-type programmes.

115. In Tanzania, for example, repaired schools were clearly a source of pride in the beneficiary communities. This is not enough, however, if teaching materials are lacking and teachers are under-qualified. Even though other agencies are dealing with these issues, it may be difficult for them to maintain the momentum over time, given the relative remoteness of the region and its low significance in national plans.

116. This illustrates the numerous barriers to achieving sustainability, particularly in low priority areas for development. In early 1998 this was already becoming apparent, as funding for such longer-term efforts was drying up, even for major international NGOs. Although district officers in the area have sometimes criticised UNHCR over its choice of projects to support, they are beginning to fear that once the refugee programme is gone the prospects for significant new inputs

will be very limited.

### **Emergency assistance can sometimes be re-cycled for local use when refugees go home**

117. The programme in Tanzania also demonstrates the importance of anticipating future possible uses for materials and installations intended for the short term. There can sometimes be a development potential which is not immediately apparent when both costs and political factors have to be evaluated in an emergency.

118. When providing a water supply to a large refugee camp, for example, one option could be to build a pipeline which could also serve local communities along the way, while another might involve a combination of tankering and localised boreholes. The latter option was chosen by UNHCR to provide water to Benaco camp. If the decision had been made on the basis of development priorities, a pipeline would have been chosen. This was rejected, however, because it might have been an encouragement to the refugees to stay.

119. Longer-term benefits can also accrue when it comes to choosing building materials for refugee camps. These could potentially be re-cycled when the refugees repatriate. For example, local officials in Tanzania were disappointed because UNHCR used dried bricks instead of baked, and a light-gauge corrugated iron for roofing for camp infrastructure. On the other hand, some implementing partners have successfully built in sustainability from the outset: in Karagwe District, Oxfam's water supply projects for refugees have been adapted to remain in service to the local population.

### **Income-generating projects must be carefully targeted, and community responsibility encouraged**

120. Another lesson to be drawn from the operation in Tanzania is that small-scale income-generating projects which give responsibility to local communities are often more viable than those which depend largely on central government inputs. The projects must, however, be carefully planned and targeted, failing which they may not have the desired impact because of inadequate skills transfer and management capacity, and non-competitive, limited markets for the produce.

#### *Summary of projects in Tanzania*

**Cleaning-up former camps and environmental rehabilitation:** The environmental damage caused by the influx of a large number of refugees in Kagera region was addressed immediately from the beginning of the operation. Over a period of more than three years, a number of different activities were implemented under this heading in the refugee camps and the surrounding areas. These included protective measures such as tree marking, forest patrols, information campaigns, training in fuel-saving cooking methods and fire-wood distribution in camps. In addition, rehabilitation activities such as tree-planting and soil erosion control were also implemented in the area. The programme was also continued in the existing refugee camps in Ngara District as well as in Kigoma region.

After the emptying of the camps, UNHCR, through its implementing partners CARE and KARADEA and in consultation with the local authorities, launched a plan for cleaning up the camp areas. All the houses, structures and latrines were carefully demolished, disposable items were destroyed in an environmentally-friendly manner and useful items such latrine-slabs, water

pipelines and wooden poles for construction were set aside for future use in the refugee-affected areas.

**Reafforestation** (some one million trees were to be planted) and stabilization of the environment in the former camps and the surrounding areas followed the cleaning-up of the areas. In addition, UNHCR contributed to the government efforts in the protection and rehabilitation of Game Reserves and Forest in North West Tanzania and Kigoma region.

The programme is being continued in the existing refugee camps of Ngara District and Kigoma region with a budget of US\$3 million. Care and Karadea (Karagwe Development association) implement the programme together with respective District Councils. The programme began in 1997 and is on-going.

The Districts where Zairian and Burundian refugees were accommodated, as well as those previously hosting Rwandan refugees, were supported with the rehabilitation of facilities and integration of services previously used for refugee assistance operations.

Efforts included the rehabilitation of three **dispensaries/health centres** in Ngara District and two in Karagwe District. Funds were provided for medical supplies for more than ten rural health centres in these Districts. In addition, the services of health centres in Chabalisa and Kagenyi (Karagwe District) were to be continued to serve the local population.

The project is being carried out in the Karagwe District (two dispensaries) and Ngara District (three dispensaries) for a budgeted US\$860,000. AEF and the District authorities are implementing the project.

**Primary schools** originally established for the refugee population in Karagwe, were to be handed over to the District Council. In Ngara, six schools were to be rehabilitated through UNHCR Implementing Partners AEF and the District Council. School supplies and materials were to be provided to some selected schools in the Kigoma and Kagera regions.

The rehabilitation of schools was budgeted for US\$1 million. Implementation was to be carried out by AEF and District authorities.

It was also planned to rehabilitate the **water system** in some selected areas in Kigoma Region. The water conduits in Ngara were to be upgraded to serve the local population. Similarly in Karagwe, through UNHCR's implementing partner OXFAM, the water system installed for the refugee operation was to be adapted and integrated into the existing local system.

The rehabilitation was to be carried out in the refugee-affected areas of Karagwe, Kigoma and Ngara at a cost of US\$700,000 by OXFAM and the District authorities.

As regards **infrastructure**, UNHCR, through its implementing partner SCF/UK rehabilitated some 250 Km of roads in Karagwe District and has also contributed to their subsequent maintenance. These access roads to the former camps are also vital for the District's economy and transportation system. The only access road for Karagwe to the southern part of the country, the main 109 Km Karagwe-Benaco link, was fully rehabilitated. Karagwe airstrip was extended to allow safer take-off and landing. UNHCR also planned to fully rehabilitate the 94 Km Nyakanazi-Kibondo road, another important transportation link in the area.

US\$4 million has been budgeted since 1994. In 1997 only, US\$135,000 was set

aside for maintenance of these roads. Infrastructure activities were implemented by Save the Children Fund/UK together with the District authorities.

**Institutional support and capacity building:** UNHCR provided support to the Ministry of Home Affairs and Local Authorities for establishing their presence in the field and coordinating the assistance operation for the refugees. UNHCR also promoted the training of local staff and representatives of line ministry Departments to participate in delivering assistance to the refugees. In 1997, UNHCR and the Government of Tanzania also undertook to strengthen and encourage further involvement of national NGOs and their umbrella organizations. UNHCR thus hoped that national NGOs would become more closely involved in advocacy, public information, emergency response and development-oriented activities in refugee-hosting areas. These activities were budgeted at US\$1,2 million.

## Burundi

### **Summary of observations**

- UNHCR's effective partnership with the Government seeks to contribute to reconciliation. Because of the embargo on all but humanitarian assistance, UNHCR is the main conduit of assistance. Project selection and co-operation with the authorities functions well at all levels.
- Reafforestation is vital for Burundi, and rehabilitation of former refugee camp areas was particularly successful. This effort should, however, be seen in the context of ongoing discussions concerning natural regeneration.
- QIPs aimed at rehabilitating infrastructure had to be implemented urgently through contracts. Although they were cost-effective and provided employment, they were not able to involve the local population as much as would be desired.
- Rice-growing projects, with food-for-work which attracted returnees, were a unique opportunity for UNHCR to substitute for the lack of development aid. Nonetheless, such projects might have been implemented by families themselves over time without requiring external incentives. Finally, income-generating projects for women can contribute to reconciliation but can be slow to show more than modest returns.

### **Introduction**

121. The rehabilitation programme in Burundi is an example of a successful partnership between UNHCR and the Government. Objectives of the projects are generally clear, distinguishing between those targeting Rwandan refugees and a more recent effort on behalf of Burundian returnees and internally displaced persons.

122. There is little need to make a distinction between helping UNHCR's beneficiaries and helping local communities because the internal conflict has affected so much of the population and the countryside. Thus, in addition to 180,000 returnees and 100,000 displaced persons, assistance was also provided to the local population. All groups were similarly affected by the long-lasting unrest, malnutrition, low education levels and the effects of the economic embargo.

123. In 1997, US\$7 million was allocated for UNHCR rehabilitation programmes in Burundi, some of which has been carried over into 1998. The 1998 programme, originally budgeted at US\$15 million has been cut to US\$8 million.



This reduction is very significant considering that UNHCR is almost the only source of international assistance in Burundi, because of the embargo on all but humanitarian aid.

124. The first series of projects focused on the reforestation in and near refugee sites and repair of social infrastructure around them in affected communities. The current programme centres on the home communities of Burundian returnees, and seeks to promote stability and encourage further repatriation and reconciliation.

### **In Partnership with the Government**

125. UNHCR's main counterpart at the national level – the Ministry for Reinstallation and Reinsertion of Displaced and Repatriated (MRRDR) – is well-placed to evaluate needs and determine how the international community might help. The Ministry has the required expertise concerning the social infrastructure, which bore much of the consequences of the conflict. Thus it is not surprising that the construction or repair of schools and health facilities accounts for nearly two thirds of the UNHCR-funded activities, with income-generating projects reflecting less than ten percent of the country programme.

126. Project selection procedures tend to work well. Provincial authorities submit lists of priorities to UNHCR from which it selects projects for funding. The procedure is straightforward, but does require officials to assess their needs seriously. The proximity of the central government no doubt facilitates implementation. The authorities participate actively by providing technical guidance, but because of their present lack of capacity the actual work is contracted out.

127. Despite the embargo on bilateral development assistance, the authorities are intent on maintaining a functioning administration, and welcome UNHCR's support. At the same time, they clearly understand UNHCR's limitations, even though local officials do sometimes call attention to the many unmet needs in rural communities.

128. Perhaps because Burundi is so centrally involved in the tensions plaguing the region, the Government is particularly anxious to ensure that programmes are developed within the existing political context. Given the polarisation of the population, UNHCR has taken great pains to maintain its basic principles and demonstrate that its assistance can contribute to an eventual solution on the basis of effective co-operation. Through its efforts, UNHCR is clearly making a significant contribution to national reconciliation.

### **Repairing the damage caused by the refugees**

129. Reforestation in and around former refugee camps was another important aspect of the rehabilitation efforts. Burundians are particularly sensitive to the importance of trees and forests, living as they do in an already highly fragile environment. In response to this need, the projects in Burundi have been particularly effective, although it is sometimes suggested that they have gone beyond what was strictly necessary in restoring the environmental damage caused by the refugees, and that natural regeneration might have accomplished part of the task.

130. UNHCR has also funded a number of small projects around the former camp sites. These projects are generally modest but well-selected for impact and

welcomed by local communities. Often they provided small complements to the work that others were doing, such as furnishing pipe joints for a mission hospital which served a large population. Elsewhere classrooms have been replastered and repainted, and hospital blocks repaired.

### **Rehabilitation for Returnees**

131. Most of the assistance aimed at reintegrating returnees took the form of small, independent infrastructure projects, either reconstructing buildings damaged by the conflict or neglect, or building new structures, using contractors. These projects are implemented as QIPs, with the emphasis on 'quick'. There was good reason for urgency because Burundi refugees came back from the former Zaire in a massive and spontaneous manner, and, in the words of the Branch Office in Bujumbura, "everything had to be done 'quickly' in order to stop these returnees from being dispersed which will result in impossible monitoring by UNHCR."

132. Community participation in these projects was limited, however, and UNHCR ran the risk of sacrificing a degree of sustainability and setting bad precedents by having much of the work done through contractors. This was recognised by UNHCR Burundi, but it was felt that by making minimum community services rapidly available to the local populations as well as returnees, sustainability and stability could be ensured by guaranteeing security, availability of food, medical services and primary education.

133. The QIPs offered other benefits. Many local residents including returnees obtained employment through UNHCR's contracted projects, reducing their dependency on external assistance. UNHCR insisted on the beneficiaries' participation in the reconstruction of individual houses. In the context of Burundi, however, full community participation will only be possible, however, when minimum stability in the social fabric is restored.

### **UNHCR assistance has a trickle-down effect**

134. There is a general consensus that it would be a major blow to humanitarian activities in Burundi if UNHCR were to close its programme or radically alter its contributions. UNHCR has attracted significant funding which has filtered through implementing agencies to villages. The strong personal relationships which have developed between UNHCR and other agencies' staff in the process demonstrates that co-ordination in the field can often be achieved without being formalised.

135. UNHCR projects have also proven their cost-effectiveness. An example was given by a World Bank officer, who remarked on how UNHCR's programme for school construction, run on the same standards as a World Bank project, was consistently less expensive. The World Bank, on the other hand, does insist on a participatory component from the targeted community.

### **Production Projects**

136. UNHCR can also play a unique role in situations where development aid is not available. An example can be found in a series of swampland recovery projects for rice growing. The technology was introduced in the early 1980s, but because of the conflict the earthworks for water control had fallen into disrepair. Consequently, returnees were employed to launch the project, with WFP providing a food-for-work element, while UNHCR supplied the technical supervision.

137. UNHCR Bujumbura commented that there was considerable discussion as to UNHCR's role in this project, which normally should be carried out by development agencies such as UNDP and FAO. It was finally decided that UNHCR should implement a pilot project. Since the swampland is very fertile, yielding many different types of products, UNHCR insisted to the local authorities on a fair share being allocated between the two ethnic groups.

138. UNHCR staff believe there is a clear relationship between the rehabilitation of the land and the fact that refugees who have rights to it are returning from Tanzania. They therefore feel that the UNHCR project is amply justified. If this is true, it could indeed militate in favour of this type of project. It could be argued, however, that over time this project could have been undertaken by the concerned families themselves with a little technical guidance from a local NGO and perhaps timber to reinforce the banks. Thus a food incentive might not have been necessary to encourage returnees to recover their lands.

### **Income-generating projects for women**

139. The need to assist vulnerable persons, predominantly widows and single mothers, is a difficult challenge in Burundi as in other programmes. A series of small income-generating projects for small groups of women receives UNHCR support. Here again, according to the Branch Office, new ground was being broken. Women's associations, especially Tutsi-Hutu mixed associations, were almost non-existent in the past, and provide a particularly good example of UNHCR's contribution to reconciliation.

140. It is too early to judge the success of these projects, and some of beneficiaries are still receiving temporary food packages issued by WFP in co-operation with the project. Some crafts groups would seem to be earning enough money to survive, though returns on their labour calculated on a per hour basis are extremely low. Small stores and poultry co-operatives would seem to afford women more time for other activities.

### *Summary of rehabilitation activities in Burundi*

**Agriculture:** In a country where malnutrition is the highest in the Great Lakes region and where 650,000 persons are on the food distribution lists, UNHCR contributed to funding one third of WFP's programme of assistance. In the framework of this partnership between the two agencies, agricultural equipment and seeds were purchased and distributed to facilitate the return of the locally-affected population and returnees to their land as well as to promote self-sufficiency. It benefits 200,000 vulnerable persons.

In 1997, US\$1.3 million was budgeted for the agriculture in Bubanza and Cibitoke. Implementation was carried out by WFP, UNHCR and the Ministry of Agriculture.

**Education:** To contribute to the schooling and to minimise the numbers of children and adolescents being enrolled in the army, UNHCR has put emphasis on rehabilitation of schools throughout the country. A total of 16 QIPs have been implemented to ensure extensive rehabilitation of existing school buildings in the provinces targeted for return. The projects include rehabilitation of premises, furniture, sanitation and water systems.

The total budget for education in 1998 was US\$560,000 for two schools per province. Implementation was to be carried out by IRC, OXFAM, ARP (Austrian Relief Programme) and local enterprises.

**Health, Nutrition and Sanitation:** In Bujumbura, a programme of construction of three health centres, including basic medical material is being implemented. The project also contributed to the purchase of medical equipment for the health infrastructures which were destroyed during looting. In Cibitoke and Muyiga, UNHCR through its implementing partners, purchased medicine for the returnees and for the pharmacies administered by the health centres. Since March 1998, two nutritional and therapeutic centres have been put at the disposal of the local population and the returnees to the district of Cibitoke.

The total budget for health programmes was US\$500,000 in 1997 and 1998. Implementation was to be carried out by Concern, IMC(International Medical Corp), UNICEF.

**Reafforestation:** From 1995 to 1998, reforestation took place, mainly in the North of the country. The project started in 1995, with the refugees themselves planting trees in the camp areas. In 1996, 4 million plants were provided to reafforest the North of the country. In 1997, the programme was handed over to the local administration. Due to very heavy workload imposed on them to implement the Peace and Reconstruction Programme, only 900,000 plants out of 2 million survived. Under the project, 3,920 hectares of reafforested land were maintained and 260,000 fruit trees were produced in Ngosi. In the western provinces, 80,000 trees were produced for public building areas (schools and hospitals). In 1998 the implementing arrangements were made through WFP and the Department of Agriculture, with WFP ensuring implementation, monitoring and follow-up.

Reafforestation was budgeted at US\$140,000, and in 1998 was to be carried out by WFP, and national authorities.

**Shelter and infrastructure:** In view of the massive repatriation which took place in the northern province of Ruyigi at the end of 1997, 67 kilometres of roads have been repaired and maintained. In Gatumba, Muyinga, Songere and Ruyigi, transit and reception centres have been rehabilitated under this project.

Total budget for shelter and infrastructure was US\$450,000 during 1997 and 1998. Implementation was to be carried out by OXFAM Quebec.

**Income-generation activities:** To promote integration of returnees, a provision has been made to continue the income-generation projects which started in 1997, with a special focus on programmes developed by women's groups in the provinces of Muyinga, Ruyigi and Bujumbura. It covers both funds for agricultural /breeding projects in rural areas and funds for small business with revolving funds.

The activities were budgeted for US\$245,000 in 1997 and US\$50,000 in 1998. In 1997 ARP OXFAM Quebec was responsible for implementation; In 1998, CAFOB (Collectif des associations et ONGS féminines du Burundi) together with the Ministry of Agriculture.