

3rd meeting

**LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE RWANDA EMERGENCY
FURTHER REFLECTIONS**

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In June 1995, the High Commissioner presented a Conference Room Paper on the subject of lessons learnt from the Rwanda Emergency to the Sub-Committee on Administrative and Financial Matters (EC/1995/SC.2/CRP.21/Rev.1). In order to ensure that the lessons learnt from this particularly tragic emergency would receive the attention and follow-up they deserve, the Office adopted a three-pronged approach. It focused upon (i) implementation of the recommendations presented in the 1995 Conference Room Paper, (ii) informal consultations with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), other United Nations agencies and donors on relevant issues of common concern which arose from the operation and (iii) UNHCR support of the Joint Evaluation of the Rwanda Emergency, through participation in the Steering Committee.

2. This paper is based upon a recently convened workshop whose participants were directly involved in the emergency operation. It provides an update on the UNHCR internal follow-up process and touches upon the findings of the Joint Evaluation insofar as they are relevant to this purpose. This concerns in particular a number of observations raised by the 1995 Conference Room Paper which have since also been addressed in the Joint Evaluation reports, including certain recommendations directed to the High Commissioner for Refugees, notably recommendations C-1 (Camp Security), C-7 (Impact on Local Population and Environment) and C-8 (Equitable Food Distribution).

3. The recommendations of the Joint Evaluation which relate to humanitarian action by the United Nations system as a whole are currently the subject of inter-agency consultations and are being placed on the agenda of the various Working Groups on the follow-up of ECOSOC resolution 1995/56 established within the overall framework of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, in which UNHCR is represented. In parallel to this, UNHCR is conducting an internal study to review the lessons learnt from the Rwanda Emergency in the light of the reports prepared by the Joint Evaluation.

4. It should be noted that this paper is concerned with the post emergency evaluation process only and therefore does not address current developments in the Great Lakes Region. An update on this is found in the relevant documentation presented to the Standing Committee (EC/46/SC/CRP.35).

II. REFLECTIONS ON LESSONS LEARNT

A. Emergency preparedness and contingency planning

5. For purposes of operational planning and funding, a distinction must be made between global and country-specific emergency preparedness. On the global level, UNHCR has further enhanced its rapid response capacity as documented in the revised Catalogue of Emergency Response Resources published in October 1995 and presented to the Standing Committee in January 1996 in conjunction with a Conference Room Paper on ECOSOC resolution 1995/56 (EC/46/SC/CRP.7). Additional elements concern stand-by arrangements with a further specialist

agency (Red-R Australia) and the emergency deployment of staff and office accommodation. The urgent need for the latter was one of the lessons learnt from the Rwanda Emergency already flagged in the 1995 Conference Room Paper.

6. Global emergency preparedness measures form part of UNHCR's ongoing activities and are thus funded within existing means. Country-specific measures, however, such as site construction or the pre-positioning of major relief items to cover exceptional needs cannot be implemented without additional financial support, all the more so when even ongoing programmes are not fully funded, as is currently the case in some major conflict areas. Effective action in this domain therefore depends upon the willingness of donors to provide funding for preparedness measures before an emergency occurs, as stressed both by the 1995 Conference Room Paper and by the Joint Evaluation. Country-specific preparedness measures also require the timely cooperation of potential countries of asylum with respect to a range of activities which include adequate protection and security arrangements and the early identification of suitable refugee reception sites. Major considerations here are that these should be serviceable, located at a reasonable distance from the border, and designed to limit the risk of environmental damage.

7. Intensive consultations between UNHCR, Governments, NGOs and other agencies, in coordination with DHA, have resulted in a large measure of agreement concerning the technical specifications and inter-agency mobilization procedures of Government Service Packages. The concept, which arose out of the complex emergencies of recent years and often involved the deployment of military resources, has developed into a broad set of rapid response measures of a largely non-military nature. Such packages are, however, unlikely to bring about a significant improvement in global response capacity for the rare exceptional massive emergency unless more Governments are willing to enter into a commitment to provide them in case of need.

8. Another major initiative embarked upon as a result of lessons learnt from previous emergencies concerns the formulation of UNHCR's Guidelines on Contingency Planning which are now in their final drafting stage. Informal consultations with DHA and representatives of other United Nations agencies which are still ongoing have led to a better mutual understanding of the contingency planning concept and its implications and have been taken into account in the preparation of the guidelines. These are primarily intended for use by UNHCR field staff and describe contingency planning as a dynamic process subject to regular review in collaboration with UNHCR's partners.

9. UNHCR continues to consult widely with both local and international NGOs in the framework of the follow-up to the UNHCR-NGO Partnership in Action (PARinAC) Declaration and Plan of Action. In April 1996 it published a comprehensive Programme Management Handbook. The chapter on Emergency Preparedness and Response sets out policy guidelines for the allocation of responsibilities and covers issues of organization and coordination in emergencies. As noted by the Joint Evaluation, these are vital elements in an effective emergency response which depend upon the active participation and support of both donor Governments and countries of asylum.

B. Protection

10. One of the most preoccupying difficulties in the Rwanda emergency concerned the physical protection of refugees in volatile camp environments devoid of governmental law enforcement agents. In recent complex emergencies, this type of situation has become increasingly common, particularly during the initial stages. Working in such conditions has, in many instances, exposed the staff of UNHCR and other relief agencies to intolerable levels of danger and stress. While the provision of adequate security in refugee camps is normally the responsibility of the country of asylum, it has become evident that certain countries lack the necessary resources to ensure effective policing of large refugee camps; in some situations a recognized governmental authority has been altogether absent.

11. In the past, various pragmatic ad hoc arrangements have had to be established so as to ensure the protection to which both refugees and relief workers are entitled. This issue needs to

be addressed as a matter of principle, and the High Commissioner therefore welcomes the recommendation on camp security made by the Joint Evaluation and hopes that it will result in the identification of a range of options which can be adopted speedily by the international community when the need arises. In the case of the Rwandan camps in eastern Zaire, the lack of early agreement on such measures led to a period of insecurity lasting up to eight months and resulted in a range of unfortunate consequences.

12. As noted by the Joint Evaluation, the deployment of Zairian elite troops funded by UNHCR and working with a small international civilian police unit was instrumental in re-establishing security in the camps by mid-1995. While the arrangement, which is still ongoing, requires substantial funding, this represents only a fraction of the cost which would have been required to field an international peace-keeping force or a private security force, both of which had earlier been mooted as possible options. During 1996, the UNHCR Inspection and Evaluation Service is planning to undertake an evaluation of the work of the Zairian contingent in order to ascertain what lessons can be learnt from this experience. While the situation in the camps has improved, the Office remains seriously preoccupied about the deteriorating security situation in the border region as a whole which is likely to persist, if not worsen, in the absence of more comprehensive security arrangements involving all the countries of the region.

C. Delivery of material assistance

13. The need for operational guidelines to ensure equitable food distribution was raised both in the 1995 UNHCR Conference Room Paper and in recommendation C-8 of the Joint Evaluation, which is addressed to the High Commissioner. In early 1994, UNHCR initiated the compilation of such guidelines. The draft guidelines were discussed and revised in collaboration with WFP and concerned NGOs at a recent workshop in Addis Ababa and are now close to completion.

14. The guidelines present the user with principles of best practice, a definition of the roles and responsibilities of the actors involved, and an analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of different distribution arrangements. The solution adopted will vary according to the circumstances but the most effective system in large camps has been found to be distribution to groups of families. This has, for some time now, been successfully adopted in both the United Republic of Tanzania and in eastern Zaire.

15. Among the principles stressed in the guidelines is the need to ensure the maximum involvement of refugee women in all aspects of distribution. UNHCR is currently conducting a survey of Field Offices to elicit information on the role of women in commodity distribution arrangements. The survey results may provide further input for the final version of the guidelines.

16. Distribution arrangements may be greatly facilitated by registration of the refugee community; the need for an early registration exercise has also been stressed in recent internal UNHCR evaluations. However, in many situations of mass influx, registration will not be possible for some time and may even be delayed for months. In the intervening period, the supply of relief items remains a life-saving necessity. The distribution guidelines contain information on methods which may be adopted in such circumstances to obtain a workable estimate of distribution requirements.

17. In the camps in eastern Zaire, the lack of security arrangements mentioned above as well as the difficult logistical problems involved necessitated the postponement of the registration planned for October 1994, a decision jointly taken by UNHCR and the other agencies and NGOs involved. However, the estimated number of beneficiaries used proved later to be reasonably accurate, and the suggestion made in the Joint Evaluation that large savings could have been achieved if the registration had taken place at that time is therefore erroneous. In August 1994, UNHCR and WFP agreed on a working figure of 850,000 beneficiaries in Goma which was based upon various estimates including those derived from aerial surveys. This number tallies well with the registration figure of 740,000 reached in February 1995 if departures are taken into account. At no time during the emergency was food either delivered or distributed in excess of these requirements.

D. Local population and the environment

18. As stated in the Progress Report on the Guidelines on Refugees and the Environment presented to the Sub-Committee on Administrative and Financial Matters in October 1995 (EC/SC.2/79 and Add.1), attention to environmental matters and their impact on refugees and local communities has become an integral part of UNHCR's operational response. The need for measures to minimize irreversible local impacts caused by the presence of large refugee populations has also been noted in finding C-7 of the Joint Evaluation which recommends a quick-disbursing fund for early compensation of host communities and the inclusion of the affected local population in the distribution of relief commodities such as fuel. It is clear that measures such as these which may involve very considerable financial input cannot be undertaken by UNHCR alone since the limited funding at its disposal has to be disbursed primarily for the benefit of refugees. Moreover, there are great difficulties in implementing such proposals in situations where there is no functioning governmental authority and where the majority of the local population is living in conditions of absolute poverty.

19. UNHCR has, however, always supported and, at times, acted as a catalyst to initiate programmes by other aid and development agencies that aim to assist local populations in areas affected by large concentrations of refugees. In this spirit, UNHCR engaged jointly with UNDP in an Action Plan at the 1995 Bujumbura Conference. Its purpose was to target host communities in Burundi, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zaire with the aim to provide, *inter alia*, income-generation opportunities and restoration of environmental damage. The Action Plan, which became known as the UNDP/UNHCR Initiative in the Great Lakes Region, was presented to donors on the occasion of a special meeting held in January 1996. Project activities will start as the coordination and information mechanisms are put in place and responses to funding requests are received.

III. CONCLUSION

20. As described in this paper, the lessons learnt from the Rwanda emergency have led to a number of concrete measures aimed at improving the early response capacity of UNHCR. This process has received an added stimulus by the research undertaken in the context of the Joint Evaluation exercise. The latter is a valuable initiative and its findings deserve to be closely studied in inter-agency consultations, in particular the DHA-sponsored working groups established to review ECOSOC resolution 1995/56 on strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance by the United Nations. The groups in which UNHCR is actively participating are reviewing gaps in the emergency response capability of the United Nations and are to be tasked with addressing the relevant recommendations of the Joint Evaluation.

Annex

DECISION ON LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE RWANDA EMERGENCY

The Standing Committee,

OP1 Takes note of EC/46/SC/CRP.28 on *Lessons Learnt from the Rwanda Emergency: Further Reflections*;

OP2 Welcomes measures taken by the High Commissioner to improve the emergency response capacity of the Office through the further development of rapid response mechanisms and standby arrangements;

OP3 Underlines the importance of contingency planning and encourages efforts by UNHCR to develop guidelines in this respect, in consultation with the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and other United Nations agencies;

OP4 Notes with satisfaction the emphasis placed in UNHCR's newly issued Programme Management Handbook on the selection, control and coordination of implementing partners in emergency situations;

OP5 Encourages UNHCR to continue to play a catalytic role in initiating programmes that aim to assist local populations in areas affected by large concentrations of refugees;

OP6 Commends the High Commissioner on innovative initiatives taken to improve security conditions in refugee camps in the Great Lakes region but notes, nevertheless, with concern the deteriorating security situation in parts of the region;

OP7 Calls on UNHCR to participate actively in inter-agency consultations on the recommendations of the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda, in particular in the interagency working groups established within the framework of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) to review ECOSOC resolution 1995/56 on the Strengthening of the Coordination of Emergency Humanitarian Assistance of the United Nations;

OP8 Asks to be kept informed, in the context of UNHCR's periodic reports on emergency response and on ECOSOC resolution 1995/56, of progress made in respect of the follow up of lessons learnt from the Rwanda emergency.