

Network Paper 6

**The Rwandan Refugee Crisis
in Tanzania:**

**Initial Successes and Failures
in Food Assistance**

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The Rwandan Refugee Crisis in Tanzania: Initial Successes and Failures in Food Assistance

Susanne Jaspars¹

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The Rwandan Refugee Crisis in Tanzania: Initial Successes and Failures in Food Assistance

1. Introduction

On the 28th April, an estimated 170,000 Rwandans crossed the border into Tanzania, within a 24-hour period. Though larger movements of refugees have occurred elsewhere at other times these have taken place over longer time periods. The influx into Tanzania constituted the largest and fastest refugee influx that the world had seen prior to the events in July when even larger numbers of Rwandans moved into Goma in Zaire. The movement into Tanzania was predictable, in the context of the history of conflict in Rwanda, the death of the Presidents of Rwanda and Burundi in the plane crash near Kigali on April 6th, and the subsequent systematic slaughter of Tutsis and moderate Hutus followed by rapid advance by Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) forces. Nevertheless, the scale and rapidity of the influx surprised most agencies and observers.

Despite the scale and rapidity of the influx, rates of malnutrition, morbidity and mortality during the first two months remained comparatively low. Measured in these terms the response by the local authorities and the international community were successful and, given the unprecedented nature of the influx, impressive. The experience in Ngara District stands in contrast to the disastrous outcome of the, admittedly larger, influx into Goma, Zaire several weeks later. Though the response by agencies working in the water, sanitation and health sectors was vital to the success of the operation, the achievement of the agencies involved in the provision and distribution of food assistance was particularly impressive. Within the space of 2-3 days WFP was obliged to supply the equivalent of approximately 155 tonnes of commodities per day. The general ration was to comprise cereals, pulses, oil and salt. The only item missing from the ration during the first two months was salt.

The objective of this paper is to provide RRN members with an account of the food assistance operations in Benaco camp during the two months following the initial influx, giving a preliminary assessment of the factors contributing to the comparative success of the initial operation and also to examine the issues from the Benaco experience which are pertinent to other situations. Inevitably substantial difficulties were encountered during the operation and the paper discusses two of the principal difficulties, notably those resulting from a lack of accurate information on the camp population and the relationship between the two key UN agencies; WFP (responsible for the supply of the general ration to

the camp) and UNHCR (responsible for coordinating the distribution of the food within the camp). The writer's perspective is of a food coordinator employed by UNHCR during the first few weeks of the operation. The limited time available for preparing the paper did not permit a more comprehensive review of operation examining experiences in the water, sanitation and health sectors and incorporating the perspectives of those NGOs involved in the initial response. Such a review would require a funded study with access to the records and personnel of many agencies. This paper offers only a preliminary review but it is hoped will share experiences and possible lessons from this very recent, and ongoing, operation.

2. Background: The Influx and the Camp

Almost all the refugees in the influx of 28th April and the subsequent movements were Hutus, fleeing from Rwanda in fear of reprisals from the advancing Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). Many of them had already been displaced in Rwanda before deciding to cross the border. After the unprecedented movement during 28th April, the influx continued at a steady, though much lower rate of about 2,000-3,000 a day. Those arriving after the 28th were mostly from the communes closest to the border, and had fled straight from their villages. Although the numbers crossing the border started to decrease after about a month, the population in Benaco continued to increase at a similar rate to that occurring after the initial influx. This was because several border crossings were used, many of which were initially unknown to UNHCR. During the first two months of the operations, pockets of refugees continued to be 'discovered' just along the Tanzanian side of the border. These people were then encouraged to walk to Benaco.

Several camps were already in existence in western Tanzania accommodating refugees from Rwanda and Burundi who had moved as a result of previous instability in the two countries. The largest and most recent exodus had been of Burundians in the October/November period of 1993 when approximately 325,000 had moved into Tanzania following the coup d'état and ensuing inter-ethnic violence. The response to this influx had been highly problematic and malnutrition, morbidity and mortality rates had risen substantially above normal levels. In planning the transfer of Burundian refugees to more permanent sites, UNHCR and the Tanzanian authorities had identified a site of approximately 2.5 square kilometres at Benaco near Ngara town as a possible site for a camp of 15-20,000 refugees. In the face of such a massive influx and in the absence of other, readily available, sites the

initial influx from Rwanda was directed to the Benaco site which quickly became the most over-crowded as well as the largest existing refugee camp. In June, pressure on the Benaco site was reduced by the opening of a camp at Lumasi, a site of 4 square kilometres, and the movement of some of the Benaco population to the new site.

Initial camp organization and programme implementation utilised the administrative structures found in Rwanda, ie. geographical areas at the prefecture, commune and sector levels. The camp was divided into the 20 communes from which the majority of refugees had come and commune leaders were used in organising the layout of the camp and also in many aspects of programme implementation. Food distributions were initially organised on a commune basis.

The only agencies initially present, were those already working in the camps of Burundian refugees, notably the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the Tanzanian Red Cross Society (TRCS) and MSF-France. These agencies played a crucial role in the initial response to the Rwandan influx. Many of the staff of these agencies had been involved in response to the influx of Burundian refugees and were determined not to see a repeat of the appalling conditions that had developed. This was an important contributing factor to the comparative success of the response to the Rwandan influx.

UNHCR had already deployed members of the Emergency Unit following the death of the Presidents of Rwanda and Burundi. On 15th April teams had been despatched to Zaire, Uganda and Tanzania in the expectation that an exodus could occur across one or more of these borders. One of the senior members of the Unit was in Ngara District on 28th April. When the influx occurred in Ngara the teams in Uganda and Zaire were redeployed to Ngara.

After the massive refugee influx on the 28th April and the accompanying media coverage, additional NGOs arrived in Ngara and established programmes. Some of these agencies had, similarly to UNHCR and the Tanzanian authorities anticipated an exodus from Rwanda. Many of the NGOs already had offices in Nairobi and because of reductions in their programmes in Kenya and Somalia, had the staff and infrastructure available to quickly establish programmes in Ngara. NGOs working in Benaco camp in the first month included: CARE, TCRS, Concern, IFRC/TRC, MSF-Holland (MSF-H), MSF-France (MSF-F), MSF-Spain (MSF-S), IRC, Oxfam, AICF. Other UN agencies involved in the operation were WFP and UNICEF.

3. A Description of the Food and Nutrition Programmes Undertaken in Benaco and an Assessment of their Effectiveness

Food supply to Ngara

Although the population that crossed the border on the 28th April was estimated at 170,000, UNHCR immediately decided to use a planning figure of 250,000. This took into account possible inaccuracies in the initial estimate, and the continuing influx of refugees. The daily food requirements of a refugee population of this size was 155 tonnes. It was decided to use the same ration composition as that established for use in Rwanda, Burundi and for the refugees from Burundi already in Tanzania, ie. cereals (420 gm), pulses (120 gm), oil (25 gm), salt (5 gm), and later blended food (50 gm). The cereal component for the first months was white maize which was provided in whole grain form.

Fortunately, extensive borrowing of food for the Rwandan refugees was possible almost immediately following the influx. All food for WFP programmes in Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania enters via Dar Es Salaam port. Consignments originally intended for programmes in Rwanda could therefore easily be diverted to Rwandan refugees in Tanzania. Cereals were borrowed from the Tanzanian Strategic Grain Reserve store at Shinyanga, only a days drive from Benaco camp. More than 10,000 MT of white maize was borrowed, which was sufficient for 2-3 month food supply for the new Rwandan case-load. The source of pulses was mostly through local purchase. In addition, ICRC managed their operation in Rwanda from Ngara, and had food stores on this site. Food for the first distribution in Benaco was in fact borrowed from ICRC stocks.

Even though precise information on the food pipeline, allocations, and dispatches was rarely available from WFP or what had been approved for local purchase (see Section 5), it was clear that for most commodities, there was a 2-3 month stock in country, even if this involved borrowing from other programmes and would require subsequent replenishment. At camp level however, there was never more than a three day supply, which seriously hampered the organisation of food distribution. Low food stocks at camp level often meant that a three day ration was distributed over a four day period resulting in an effective reduction of the ration level below the target in the initial distributions. The main problem experienced by WFP in the initial phase was the lack of trucking capacity, and also the poor road conditions.

The only item missing from the general ration in the first two months as a result of inadequate supply was salt. In June, the ration of blended food was reduced because shortages in supply were anticipated.

Food distribution in Benaco camp

Food distributions were organised and implemented with the help of refugee leaders who were asked to divide the population into manageable units, to provide lists of families for each unit, and to assist in the distribution itself. Existing population divisions such as commune and sector (a smaller unit than a commune) were used. For the first four weeks (ie. until the end of May) the distributions were carried out by the Tanzanian Red Cross, together with IFRC and the Rwandan Red Cross. Much of the population was already known to the Rwandan Red Cross, as they had distributed food to the same communes when they had been displaced in Rwanda. The food distribution system set up in Benaco was the same as that used in displaced camps in Rwanda.

Food distribution was organised on a three day cycle with rations for three days being issued to approximately one third of the camp population each day. Distributions were made from one central site, with up to 20 distribution points, each point usually catering for one sector. The names of heads of family were called out from lists prepared with the assistance of commune leaders. Using this method, it was possible to start food distribution almost immediately, but was a very lengthy and at times chaotic procedure.

Preventing over-distribution was extremely difficult in the first few weeks of the operation as a result of the lack of a formal registration of the camp population and the lack of adequate controls over the food supplied to the distribution points and the measuring of rations for individual households. With a continuing influx of refugees, commune leaders would inform the Red Cross of increases in their commune size but without any control, it was easy for these leaders to artificially inflate the size of their commune. The Red Cross had no way of verifying whether the stated increase in the commune population was factually correct. At the same time, refugees who had spent time in the displaced camps in Rwanda, were familiar with the system for distributing food and it was not difficult for them to inflate their family size, or register themselves in more than one commune. Over a three day period during May the population indicated by the household lists prepared by commune leaders increased by almost 100,000 whilst the actual population increase over

this period was probably around 10,000. A formal registration linked to the issuance of ration cards did not take place until July when the population indicated by the commune leaders had reached 350,000. As a result of the registration process this figure was brought down to 230,000.

The speed with which the distribution programme had to be implemented also meant that there was little control over the supply of food to the distribution sites, and during distribution itself. Sites could be supplied with underweight bags without checks, and the substantial numbers of refugees staff involved in carrying out the distribution meant that over-scooping also occurred.

A major obstacle to improvement of the food distribution system was the fact that the distribution had to be carried out continuously. There was never more than a three day food supply in Benaco, and distribution had to take place every day. The distribution process, which involved calling out the names of every household, often took over 12 hours a day. There was simply no time available for those involved to evaluate the system being used and develop improvements.

At the end of May, Concern and CARE became involved in food distributions so that responsibility for different communes was divided between the Red Cross, Concern and CARE. By this time, a basic system for reporting on food distributions had been implemented by UNHCR, and it was only because of this that the problems of over-distribution became apparent. It was clear that UNHCR had to assert some control over increases in the feeding population. Commune leaders were therefore made to report any increases in their population on a daily basis to the UNHCR Field Coordinator, rather than directly to the distributing agency. UNHCR would then give the new figures to the distributing agency, and arrange for the pre-positioning of food on the appropriate distribution site.

UNHCR's ability to verify population increases was limited. It was known which communes should have increases in their population in Benaco because UNHCR had established a Border Team to monitor Rwandans crossing the border into Tanzania, but exact numbers were difficult to determine. At two of the border crossings, refugees were given "tokens" for each individual crossing into Tanzania. These tokens had to be handed in at a reception center at Benaco, where the number of new arrivals for each commune was recorded, and

the new arrivals were given their initial three day ration. This approach was only partially successful. Not all refugees passed these two border crossings, and one of the border crossings was very close to the camp, which meant it was easy to walk back to the border and collect a new token.

In addition to an inflated population figure for food distribution, the first distribution reports from the three agencies showed substantial over-distributions. The quantities of food distributed when divided by the target ration for each beneficiary implied a total 'feeding' population 20-30% larger than the population according to the (inflated) household lists prepared by commune leaders. A possible explanation was that the bags of maize and beans were underweight when delivered to the distribution site. Another was that over-scooping occurred particularly for oil and blended food such as Corn Soy Milk (CSM).

Distributing food to a population of unknown size, with commodities in units of unknown weight, and with distribution being undertaken on a daily basis by three different agencies as well as food entering and leaving the warehouse daily, meant that accurate reporting on food distribution was almost impossible. This was certainly one of the factors that contributed to a deteriorating relationship between UNHCR and WFP (see Section 5). At the same time, efforts to control the growth of the population according to the commune leaders and organizing and reporting on food distributions absorbed most of the time of UNHCR field staff leaving little time for their coordination function and planning other programmes.

The ability to control food distributions to a large refugee population is closely linked to the accuracy of information on their numbers. Whichever method of food distribution is eventually adopted, the number of beneficiaries needs to be known. Though the registration in Benaco was in fact one of the quickest registrations carried out by UNHCR when compared with previous refugee situations, the Benaco experience once again shows the need for refugees to be registered as soon as possible after arrival at a camp.

Supplementary feeding programmes

As part of their emergency relief 'package', the different MSF organisations working in the camp immediately established therapeutic and supplementary feeding programmes for malnourished children. The first supplementary feeding programmes were wet feeding

programmes for moderately malnourished children. These programmes were implemented as matter of course, before assessment of the nutritional status of the refugee population, although it was generally agreed that the nutritional status of refugees on arrival appeared to be good.

The main aim of the wet supplementary feeding programmes was to protect the most vulnerable against possible shortages in the general ration. Serious problems in the supply of general ration commodities to the Burundian refugees in Tanzania in late 1993 had resulted in an increase in the prevalence of malnutrition. This was exacerbated by subsequent delays in supplementary food supply, when malnutrition had reached high levels. MSF-F in particular, was determined to prevent a similar situation occurring in Benaco. It was felt that a 'curative' wet supplementary feeding programme could be justified, even though the nutritional status of the population was thought to be good.

From the start of the operation, MSF-F initiated discussion on a dry supplementary feeding programme for all under fives. If the main aim of supplementary feeding in this context was prevention, rather than alleviation of malnutrition, then it was felt that all those who were most vulnerable to malnutrition should be assisted, not only those who were already malnourished. The programme was strongly supported by UNHCR, and later also by MSF-Holland and MSF-Spain. The programme was planned for a period of three months, in the expectation that problems with food supply and distribution were likely to occur during this period. After the three month period, it was hoped that more information would be available on the adequacy of the general food pipeline, and that the food distribution system would be well established.

An unusual feature of the supplementary feeding programmes was that resourcing and transport of certain supplementary food commodities, as well as their distribution, were sub-contracted to the health NGOs. Anticipating delays, NGOs were unwilling to rely on WFP or UNHCR for the supply of supplementary food. UNHCR agreed, and funded NGOs to resource and transport blended food, oil, and sugar, where necessary. However, it was also realised that discussions should start immediately on WFP resourcing of supplementary food, for programmes after the initial three month period.

The dry supplementary feeding programme for all under fives has raised important

questions for MSF, WFP and UNHCR. UNHCR made an important step forward in recognising that problems are likely to exist in food distribution and supply in the first few months of an operation, and that therefore it is important to protect those who are more vulnerable to malnutrition. For WFP, the programme proved controversial, as it was seen as displaying a lack of trust in WFP's ability to supply an adequate general ration. Within the MSF 'family', the programme has provoked a debate on whether blanket feeding of children under five in emergency situations should become general practice, or whether MSF could even begin to take responsibility for the supply and distribution of general rations.²

Nutritional and health status

Even before a formal nutritional survey was carried out, the impression of all those working with the Rwandan refugees was that they had arrived in good nutritional condition. This impression changed slightly after a few weeks, when it was perceived that the newer arrivals were in worse condition than those that had arrived earlier.

Even though it was extremely difficult to carry out a nutritional survey in a camp the size of Benaco and with no accurate population figures, it was felt necessary to attempt such a survey. It was known by late May that it was planned to transfer some of the refugees at Benaco to two new sites and that it would not be possible to carry out a survey during the transfers. If a survey was postponed until after the planned transfer had been completed then it would be at least three months into the operation. In the light of the on-going and planned nutritional programmes it was felt necessary to have an early estimate of the prevalence of malnutrition to judge the necessity for some of these programmes and also for subsequent evaluation purposes.

A random cluster survey was undertaken in June, more than one month into the operation at Benaco, by the NGOs involved in feeding programmes, UNHCR and UNICEF. A total of 912 children under 110 cm were assessed, of which 4.5% were found to be malnourished (<80% weight-for-height). The survey also found that the coverage of the therapeutic and wet supplementary feeding programmes was 31.2% and that coverage of the measles vaccination programme was 90.2%. The low prevalence of malnutrition was attributed not only to the good condition of refugees on arrival, but also the effectiveness of the response by NGOs in

² At the time of writing MSF International is undertaking a feasibility study of the need for MSF to become involved in food aid programmes.

the fields of water, health and sanitation. The over-distribution of food could also have contributed to the maintenance of good nutritional status. However, the lack of distribution monitoring at the time, makes it difficult to say whether this over-distribution occurred evenly over the entire refugee population, or whether only certain sections or individuals within the population benefited. Judging from previous experiences the latter is more likely to have been the case.

The successful implementation of the various programmes meant that morbidity and mortality in the first one to two months of the operation remained low. This was a considerable achievement considering the health risks associated with the extreme overcrowding in the camp. Crude mortality rates remained below 0.5/10,000/day throughout May and June. The principal causes of morbidity were malaria, acute respiratory infections and diarrhoea.

Evidence of a low prevalence of malnutrition questioned the need for the "curative" wet supplementary feeding programme. There could be little justification for a programme to alleviate malnutrition, when only 4.5% of the population is malnourished. The survey, however, only gave a statistically valid estimate of the prevalence of malnutrition in Benaco as a whole, whereas this population was soon to be divided into three. Before deciding on the closure of the wet supplementary feeding programme for all three future refugee camps, it was decided to carry out investigation on feeding center registrations, to get an impression of differences in malnutrition in different communes. One of the communes in particular, was thought to have more malnutrition than others. As this commune was due to remain in Benaco, it was thought there may be a need to continue this programme in Benaco, but not in the other two new sites.

There was still felt to be sufficient justification for the dry supplementary feeding programme for all under fives, as this was from the start meant to be a preventive programme. As agencies were already stretched, it was agreed that implementation of this programme could be delayed slightly. Agencies involved in both feeding activities and sanitation felt that the priority should be the implementation of sanitation programmes.

Nutrition monitoring

Although the nutritional situation had remained good for at least the first two months of

the operation, the risks of a serious deterioration in nutritional status were still present. Over-crowding remained a serious risk to health, and at the time of the nutritional survey, water supply was only estimated at 4 litres/person/day, though this figure was based on inflated population figures. An increase in morbidity, would obviously result in an increase in the prevalence of malnutrition, as disease is one of the immediate causes of acute malnutrition (low weight-for-height). At the same time, a registration of the refugee population was planned, which would almost certainly result in a reduction in the total quantity of food distributed. The acceptability of whole grain maize as the cereal provided in the general ration also had to be questioned (see below).

Careful monitoring of the situation was therefore necessary, and the use of a few basic indicators was planned to provide an overall picture of changes in the nutritional situation. These would be combined with morbidity and mortality rates to assess or anticipate changes in the nutritional situation.

1. New admissions to the therapeutic and wet supplementary feeding programme.
2. Nutritional contents of the ration received.
3. Market monitoring.

As part of their nutrition programmes in refugee camps, MSF now routinely carries out Food Basket Monitoring which assesses the ration that is actually received by refugees. This involves weighing the ration received for randomly selected families and calculation of the nutritional contents of the received ration. In Benaco, this technique was taken one step further to include the monitoring of food availability in the homes. It was known that some families were probably receiving more than one family ration and the existence of large markets indicated that substantial trade was taking place. Knowing the total amount of food distributed did not tell the amount actually received by individual families or what they consumed. In Benaco, samples were taken so that differences could be detected in the food received depending on the distributing agency and the receiving commune. Health NGOs such as MSF-HFS and AICF would monitor two distributions per month for each of the three distributing agencies. Forty families were to be sampled at each of these distributions, covering a minimum of three communes so that a total of 240 families would be sampled every month. The same number of families, from the same commune as sampled at the distribution site, would be visited at home two days after the food distribution. The actual

families however were not the same.

Market monitoring is not routinely done in refugee situations, but it was thought necessary in Benaco to get an impression of the developing food economy in the camp. At least five major markets sprung up almost immediately, which provided ample evidence of trade in refugee food and other items. Maize in particular was a commonly traded commodity, raising questions about the acceptability of this particular commodity to Rwandan refugees. The prices of all commodities included in the general ration were therefore monitored and in addition the prices of plantain, sweet potato, cassava, sugar and green vegetables commodities commonly eaten by Rwandans. Firewood prices were also monitored.

4. Why the Initial Success?

The assistance programmes to refugees in Benaco can be considered a success story when compared to many other refugee operations where the initial influx is often followed by increased rates of malnutrition, morbidity and in some case mortality. Many factors came together to make at least an initial success story of the relief operations in Ngara District. This section attempts to identify and describe the principal factors. The fact that the refugees were in good physical condition, in terms of their nutritional and health status (though not including mental health and HIV) was clearly an important factor but this has been the case in other refugee situations, where the nutritional status deteriorated quickly after arrival in the camp (Keen, 1992).

Preparedness

UNHCR's Emergency Unit, as it now exists, was established in 1991 following the recognition of the lack of preparedness during the Gulf War and its associated population movements. The main functions of the Unit are preparedness and rapid response to emergencies. Preparedness is realised both in terms of material and human resources. UNHCR has established stockpiles of non-food items for refugees and other essentials such as vehicles and computers. The Unit has experienced emergency officers, administrators and assistants, who can constitute emergency teams to be sent immediately following or even before an anticipated refugee influx. In addition to the staff of the Emergency Unit, UNHCR has established an emergency roster. Regular staff sign up for the roster, and for a period

of six months these staff should be available to assist in an emergency at 48 hours notice. These include protection officers, public information officers, and field officers. Workshops in emergency management are held for staff on this roster, and training is also organized for government counterparts and NGO implementing partners on a regular basis. Permanent arrangements have been made with the UK Overseas Development Administration, United Nations Volunteers, Radda Barnen, Emercom, Red R and the Danish and Norwegian Refugee Councils for the secondment of staff at short notice. The Centre for Diseases Control in Atlanta can be called on for technical support. As a result of such arrangements UNHCR had staff in Ngara before the influx and was able to field over 20 international staff in Ngara within two weeks of the initial influx.

This performance contrasts strongly with UNHCR's response in previous refugee emergencies. The Somali refugee camps in North East Kenya are an example of this, where a single Kenyan field assistant was left to cope on his own for many months following the influx. Although many factors contributed to the delayed response in this case, it was only when UNHCR was accused of "crimes against humanity" by another UN agency and MSF-B that a greater response followed.

Favourable conditions in the host country

Experienced UNHCR and NGO staff were already present in Tanzania to work in the camps with Burundian refugees, including health teams from MSF-F who could be transferred immediately to set up programmes in Benaco, and IFRC delegates and the Tanzanian Red Cross to carry out food distributions. Having staff with experience in the Burundian refugee camps setting up programmes in Benaco, greatly benefited the operation. Inadequate food supplies and dysentery epidemics had caused high levels of malnutrition and mortality in these camps, and there was therefore great determination not to see a repeat of this situation developing with Rwandan refugees in Benaco.

The Tanzanian Government was receptive to the plight of the Rwandan refugees, and assisted in identification of potential camp sites and supported UNHCR's efforts in providing assistance. Tanzania's food security arrangements for its own population, was of considerable help to WFP in supplying food for the Rwandan refugees. A strategic grain reserve had been established, and WFP was able to borrow over 10,000 MT of maize from the store in Shinyanga - only a day's drive from Benaco camp. In addition, Tanzania had a

sufficient supply of beans in country for WFP to resource most of the beans for the first two months of the operation through local purchase. Other commodities such as oil and blended food, could also be borrowed fairly easily, as imported commodities for the programmes in Rwanda and Burundi all arrived via Dar Es Salaam port. Food availability in Tanzania for the Rwandan refugees was therefore better than had been the case in other refugee emergencies. Food distribution, including all commodities except salt, could be started almost immediately. Due to problems in trucking capacity, a buffer stock could not be built up at the site of the camp itself, but on every single day, sufficient cereals, beans, oil, and blended food, would be available for at least a three day ration. This situation is still far from ideal in terms of managing distribution, but could have been much worse, if food availability as well as trucking capacity had been problematic.

Knowledge of Rwanda and refugee population

Many of the agencies working in Benaco already had experience of working with the same population in Rwanda. Some, such as MSF-Holland had been evacuated from Rwanda when the massacres commenced and the same teams were therefore available almost immediately to work with Rwandans in Tanzania. UNICEF staff from Rwanda also came to work in Benaco. Some information was therefore available on people's lives in the displaced camps in Rwanda, how long these camps had existed, what relief food they had received and what had been acceptable, as well as some knowledge of people's way of life in the rural areas. The social and political structure was also known by these agencies.

Having worked with the same beneficiary population in Rwanda, MSF-H was able to identify already trained Community Health Workers (CHW), so a community health programme could be started immediately. Further CHWs had to be trained, but the presence of at least a number of people who had been trained by MSF-H itself in Rwanda, greatly speeded up implementation of this programme. In other refugee situations, people with some health training are likely to be present amongst the refugees, but it often takes time to identify them and assess the extent of their training. Often therefore the training of community health workers and other health staff is started from scratch.

The names of prefectures, communes, and sectors in Rwanda were known, and even the approximate population in each were known from the 1991 census data, which had been provided by the ICRC. Such basic information is not available in many refugee situations.

A camp is often seen as a homogeneous group whereas this is rarely the case. However, unless an agency has experience in the refugees' country of origin, the speed with which an emergency programme is implemented, often means that responses are planned on the basis of very limited knowledge of the beneficiary population.

Somali refugee camps in Kenya again provide a good contrast. When Somalis crossed the border into Kenya at Mandera, 92 separate clans were registered by the local authorities and town elders. This division of the population continued to be used by UNHCR for food distribution and other programmes almost one year into the operation. The lack of knowledge of clan structures in Somalia meant that not even the names of the clans could be verified, let alone the number of people in each clan. It is now known that the number of clans in the area of origin of the refugees was considerably less than 92 and that certain sections of the population benefited from the system by creating 'fake clans'. Some of the clans were local (Somali) Kenyans, and the more powerful Somali clans were registered several times under different names. For Rwandans in Tanzania, at least the names of existing communes and sectors were known, the maximum possible population size, and the communes which should be increasing in size as the influx continued, and those which should remain stable.

Coordination

There was extremely good coordination between agencies working in Benaco camp, which unfortunately is quite an unusual phenomenon in the usual chaos that accompanies a major relief operation. This meant that agencies present in the camp could work effectively. It is quite common for UNHCR's coordinators to spend much of their time ensuring agencies work together, or resolving differences between agencies involved in the same programme. This was not the case in Ngara.

Much of the success in coordination must be attributed to the UNHCR emergency coordinator, herself a senior member of UNHCR's emergency unit. Needs for programmes were identified quickly, and agreements with agencies only made when there was a clearly identified need for the services. This limited the number of agencies working in the camp, and each agency managed a clearly defined aspect of the programme, with no duplication

of activities. UNHCR also rapidly had different sector specialists in place, who could ensure a coordinated approach to health, water, sanitation and food and nutrition programmes.

Even though three different MSF organizations (France, Holland, and Spain) had agreements to work in the camp, they decided to work as one MSF. This effectively reduced the number of organisations amongst which consensus needed to be reached on programme implementation, and considerably reduced UNHCR's burden in coordination.

Presence of relief infra-structure and supplies in Nairobi

Reductions in the funding for programmes in Somalia and renewed insecurity in that country meant that many of the NGOs operating programmes there had withdrawn staff, or even halted their programmes altogether. As many of these agencies had support offices in Nairobi, and ex-Somalia staff was available in Nairobi to establish programmes in Tanzania. Similarly, activities in the refugee camps in Kenya had also been reduced as a result of the stabilization of the situation and a reduction of the refugee population of about 200,000 as a result of repatriation and re-registration activities. Agency staff from these programmes could therefore also be asked to implement programmes in Tanzania. As a result, agencies such as CARE, Concern, IRC, MSF-Spain, MSF-Holland and Oxfam were able to rapidly deploy experienced personnel to Ngara District. This included both purchasing and logistics support from Nairobi, and personnel were sent on mission to Ngara to assist. Not only were the staff available, but these agencies had already established contacts in Nairobi for sources of supplies, transport etc. Programmes in Tanzania could be supported from Nairobi in the same way that programmes in Somalia, Kenya, and South Sudan had been.

The late delivery of supplementary food for the refugee programme in Kenya, and the possibility of local production of blended food on a large scale also meant that these commodities were readily available for the programme in Tanzania. For instance 1,000 tonnes of Dried Skimmed Milk had been requested by the UNHCR office in Nairobi for programmes in Kenya at the end of 1992, but the shipment did not arrive in the country until August 1993. By this time, the needs for the following year were estimated at one fifth of this amount due to the reduction in the prevalence of malnutrition in the camps in Kenya and the planned termination of supplementary feeding programmes. This food could quickly be made available for Burundian refugees in Rwanda and Tanzania, and later Rwandan refugees in Tanzania. Similarly, 200 MT of biscuits which had been ordered for the Kenya

programme did not arrive until approximately one year after the request was made and was therefore available for distribution in Ngara.

Several factories in Nairobi are able to produce blended food. This was an initiative originally supported by WFP, UNICEF and UNHCR in 1992 to meet the needs of these organizations for such commodities. When NGOs were sub-contracted by UNHCR to supply supplementary food for the refugees in Ngara, they made extensive use of local production in Nairobi.

Potential Threats to the Success Story

Despite the success of the initial operation there is still much that could change the situation and result in future less favourable overall assessments. Chief amongst these are the security situation within the camps and the risk of attention and resources being diverted away from the camps in Tanzania to those in Zaire and the rehabilitation needs within Rwanda itself.

An incident in Benaco camp on 15th June illustrates the potential threat to security in the camp. UNHCR discovered that one of the individuals with a particular responsibility for organising the massacres of Tutsis and moderate Hutus in Rwanda was present in the camp, and he was instructed to leave. Later he and his family arrived at the UNHCR compound saying that he was prepared to go, but 'his people' would not allow him to leave. Crowds started gathering around the compound which contained UNHCR and several NGO personnel and it was soon surrounded by several thousand men. Fortunately, the situation was defused after several hours but the man did not leave the camp and the situation could have had serious consequences in terms of injuries or deaths of staff, such was the degree of antagonism towards UNHCR at the time. Several agencies temporarily withdrew their international staff from work in the camp. The conclusion reached by UNHCR was that they had effectively lost control of the camp or that the reality was that control had always rested with some of the leaders.

This incident led several NGOs, particularly those that had previously worked in Rwanda, to question their assistance as they now realised that by working in Benaco, they were assisting people who might have been responsible for the deaths of some of their staff in

Rwanda. MSF-F in particular initially refused to continue to work in the camp, whilst those responsible for genocide in Rwanda were still present. International staff were withdrawn from work in the camp for at least one week but later returned. Although all programmes continued to function, and all agencies eventually returned to work in the camp, the situation remains volatile. The incident underlined the importance of knowing the refugee population and the power relations that existed prior to their movement. Without such knowledge those responsible for atrocities may be reinstated or even reinforced in their position of power, with the likely result being that the authority of UNHCR and the host country authorities is jeopardised and that security in the camps may deteriorate.

Less than three months after the Rwandan influx into Tanzania, in excess of 1 million Rwandans crossed over the border into Zaire at Goma causing a major humanitarian emergency. The worst fears for refugees in Tanzania came true in Goma when a cholera epidemic spread rapidly through the population killing tens of thousands. Goma became the focus of a major humanitarian aid operation. Benaco was no longer the largest existing refugee camp, and Tanzania was quickly overshadowed by Zaire in terms of attention by the media and the rest of the international community. Though the acute health and nutritional needs in Zaire clearly warrant it being given priority by the international community there is a very real risk that attention and financial and personnel resources will be reduced in Ngara District and that the successful preventive programmes for Rwandan refugees there will falter. Recent reports of shigella outbreaks and increased mortality in camps in Ngara District would suggest that this may be the case.

5. The Usual Problems Magnified?

UNHCR/WFP cooperation

Discussions on rationalizing the respective roles of WFP and UNHCR in refugee feeding operations started in 1991. New arrangements were approved by the end of that year, and the expanded responsibilities of WFP was foreseen in two phases (UNHCR;1992). Phase one of the implementation of the new arrangements started in January 1992 and this related to the mobilization of resources. UNHCR had previously procured food commodities for its own programmes or received food aid donations directly from bilateral donor organisations, often resulting in uncoordinated food supplies and rations missing essential

items. From January 1992, WFP became responsible for the mobilization of all basic commodities, as well as the necessary cash resources for related costs such as milling and internal transport, storage and handling (ITSH). Phase two which commenced in 1993 involved WFP taking over responsibility for the actual operational arrangements for ITSH up to the Extended Delivery Point (EDP). In general, UNHCR attempts to have the EDPs located at camp level to minimise further transport and other costs.

Under the latest Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between WFP and UNHCR regarding food aid for refugees (UNHCR/WFP, 1994), WFP is also responsible for the management of warehouses at the EDP.

Central to WFP/UNHCR cooperation is the monthly Food Availability Status Report (FASREP), which should be jointly prepared. UNHCR provides information on food distributed and population projections for the following six months. WFP provides information on the food pipeline. The usual topics of discussion at meetings to prepare the FASREP are differences between the population as indicated by the number of rations being distributed and the 'actual' population, explanations for over or under-distribution, and the expectation of any bilateral donations or in-country purchases. The FASREP is finalised by WFP in Rome, and is used to identify any breaks in the pipeline. In extreme circumstances, if WFP cannot cover the gap, then UNHCR can assist in resourcing food.

With successive MOUs, WFP has become progressively more responsible for all aspects of provision of food aid to refugees, whilst UNHCR remains responsible for the overall well-being of refugees. In some respects this represents an unsatisfactory state of affairs. WFP takes on more and more of the logistical aspects of food aid to refugees, but is not responsible for a deterioration of the nutritional status of refugees. UNHCR is responsible for the well-being of refugees, but has no direct control over any aspect of the delivery of food aid.

Food aid is seen by many as the means of saving lives, and the general perception is that if food is not provided in sufficient quantity immediately, people will inevitably die. It often takes precedence over any other form of assistance. This means that in the weeks immediately following a refugee influx many agencies, including WFP, UNHCR, and NGOs involved in providing assistance, become involved in issues of food supply and distribution or feel that they have something to say about it. Often the result is confusion and

unproductive mutual accusations.

In Ngara, WFP was extremely sensitive about providing information regarding the food supply pipeline even to UNHCR staff with whom they were jointly responsible for preparing the FASREP. Presumably such sensitivity was the product of uncertainties over the status of the pipeline and high profile nature of the operation. A complication for the agency was that its main sub-office outside Dar Es Salaam was in Kigoma and communications between Kigoma and Ngara were poor. As a result, the WFP office in Ngara often had no more information about the food pipeline than other agencies in Ngara.

The initial system of food distribution was a continual source of friction between UNHCR and WFP. Typically WFP would claim that food stocks in Benaco were low because UNHCR was distributing food to an inflated population and that diversion was taking place at the distribution site. Typically also UNHCR would claim that there was no room for improving the system because the low food stocks meant that food had to be distributed continuously, and that the apparent over-distribution was in fact a result of the provision of underweight bags by WFP. WFP would regularly assert that no improvement in food supply was possible until UNHCR had carried out a registration, whilst UNHCR would argue that it was not possible to improve the system of food distribution until WFP improved their supply and a one month buffer stock was established.

These arguments may be illustrated by a WFP press release of 8 July, 1994 where it is stated that:

WFP staff, who monitor food stocks at the central warehouse and distribution points, report that large quantities of food are being stolen daily, adding to the problems of widespread over-distribution of food rations at camp level' (WFP, 1994).

The same statement calls for a registration of refugees to "ensure that people do not receive double rations". At the same time "distribution to the estimated 350,000 Rwandan refugees has continued without interruption". An earlier press release had stated that over-crowding, lack of sanitation and shelter were the main problems facing the refugees. According to WFP therefore, the problems lay in areas for which UNHCR was responsible.

Such claims are common in refugee food assistance operations. Problems with the provision of food aid to refugees are attributed by UNHCR to problems with food supply, and by WFP to problems with food distribution. As a result, UNHCR staff dealing with food aid spend much of their time monitoring the food supply, and WFP staff monitor food distribution. They busy themselves with monitoring the areas for which the other agency is responsible, which can provide them with arguments for subsequent use in their defence. At times it seems that the points likely to be made during meetings involving the two agencies are so well known by the other side that it would almost be possible for the responsible staff in UNHCR and WFP to switch roles.

A further source of tension between UNHCR and WFP was the supplementary feeding programme for all children under five years of age. The objective of this programme was to prevent malnutrition, recognising that in most refugee situations, problems with food supply and distribution occur at some stage during the first months of the operation. As WFP in Ngara was unable to provide detailed and up-to-date information on the food pipeline, it had to be assumed by UNHCR and the agencies implementing the food distributions that there was at least a possibility of future breaks in the pipeline.

The fact that the prevalence of malnutrition in the beneficiary population was so low was not seen as an argument against the programme by NGOs and UNHCR, as there are numerous recorded cases of refugees arriving in good condition, but due to problems with food supply, the incidence of malnutrition rapidly increased (eg. Somali refugees in Ethiopia in 1988-9, Burundian refugees in Tanzania during late 1993). WFP staff, however, felt that the implementation of the under fives programme showed a lack of trust, which resulted in heated arguments about the purpose of the programme.

Sales of food aid by refugees

The sale of food aid by refugees has frequently been a cause of differences between WFP and UNHCR. It is now generally accepted by both agencies that refugees need to sell part of their ration in order to meet other basic needs not catered for by the various programmes of assistance. However, it is difficult to tell from markets whether the sales are the result of refugee families selling their ration separately, whether the food is being diverted prior to or during distribution, or whether certain sections of the population are acquiring substantially more than their entitlements and are therefore able to sell on a significant

scale. When the amount of food aid entering a local market is substantial it is invariably the latter which is assumed to be the cause. Nevertheless, the argument that food sales occur because the refugee population *in general* is *receiving too much food* is still extremely common.

The extent of the sale of food aid in Benaco was of great concern to WFP. There were five markets operating in Benaco camp, four of which acted as large maize collection sites for traders. Tanzanian traders came from far and often returned maize to the towns from which WFP had transported it to the camp. In some cases, the same trucks were even used, in which case the traders paid the WFP hired drivers to take food out of the camp again.

The most commonly sold item in the ration was maize, which can be explained by the fact that this was given in higher quantities than the other commodities, but also because this is not a normal part of diet of Rwandans, and was provided in whole grain form. The staple food in Rwanda are plantain and root crops such as sweet potato and cassava. Flour from cassava or sorghum is sometimes used to prepare a stiff porridge, and if maize flour had been provided this could have been prepared in a similar way. When traders in the camp were asked, they would say that they were taking the maize for milling which would then be returned to the camp for sale as maize flour. This was unlikely to have been the case as very little maize flour was seen on the market.

Certainly milling facilities were very limited. There was only one mill in a village near the refugee camp, where most of the customers were refugees, and had to pay 3,000 Tanzanian Shillings to mill one bag of maize. Considering that in the camp one bag of maize grain would sell for 2,500-3,000 Shillings refugees would have to sell half their maize ration if they wanted to eat maize flour. For 250,000 refugees this would mean daily sales of 52.5 MT maize, so five 10 MT trucks could be expected to leave the camp daily just for this reason.

At the time, the population figure used for food distribution was 350,000, whereas the actual population was later shown to be 230,000. An inflated population was undoubtedly a key factor in explaining the large maize sales. In all refugee situations, there is invariably a difference between the population calculated on the basis of the number of rations distributed, the registered population, and the actual population. In Benaco, the difference may have appeared larger simply as a result of the large size of the population. In Kenya

where Somali refugees in three camps were not registered until one year after arrival, rations were given to almost double the actual refugee population. However, using a usual camp size of 30,000 to 40,000, this would still mean a difference of only 30,000 between the population apparently receiving rations and the actual population. In Benaco, the population indicated by the lists prepared by commune leaders could fluctuate by this much or more in a matter of days.

Relative to the quantities of maize being sold, the quantities of beans and oil on the market were very small. Even though they were distributed in smaller quantities, beans are a traditional part of the Rwandan diet, and therefore much more likely to be eaten, and oil is an essential part of any diet. The Corn Soy Milk provided was an extremely popular item in the ration, and hardly seen on the market at all, even though a large section of the refugee population was not familiar with this food before they arrived in Tanzania. This was the only food provided in the form of flour, and many different methods of preparation could be seen when visiting refugee's homes. This could also explain the over-scooping of this particular commodity during the distribution process.

The inability of controlling food distributions without registration

The difficulties of controlling the population indicated as being eligible for rations prior to the July registration has been discussed above. The largest changes in the apparent population in Benaco occurred in the first four weeks when only the Red Cross was distributing food. This is no criticism of the Red Cross, but rather highlights the difficulties in gaining control of food distribution from the start of an operation, and especially if one agency has to distribute food to 100,000 people a day from one site on a continuous basis. At this time, commune leaders came to the Red Cross directly to inform them of increases in their population, and the Red Cross had no alternative but to accept their claims. UNHCR had some estimates of the population, but these were not used for food distribution until later. Numbers for the first weeks are shown below:

Date	UNHCR	Red Cross Food Distribution
11 May	229,816	-
19 - 21 May	-	254,202
22 - 25 May	276,823	350,531

26 - 28 May	281,075	231,855
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Numbers are much lower on 26 May, because a new system of food distribution was due to be implemented the following day, and distribution to one of the groups was only completed halfway at the last distribution using the old system.

Distributions when UNHCR provided the distributing agencies with numbers are shown below:

Date	UNHCR	Distribution
29 - 1 May	281,075	335,616
1 - 4 June	-	327,973
4 - 7 June	325,126	275,270
7 - 10 June	336,032	331,084
10 - 13 June	337,462	339,542*

* estimate

The apparent population now correlated more closely with UNHCR's estimated population figure, but as was shown by the registration in July, the actual population was only 230,000. This large difference had developed, even though UNHCR was engaged in daily negotiations with commune leaders to try and reduce the numbers requiring food. By the 13th June, the feeding population of two communes actually exceeded the entire population of those communes at the 1991 population census in Rwanda.

Even when registration has been carried out, it is not uncommon to have a substantial difference between the apparent population and the actual population. In some of the camps in Kenya, before a re-registration was carried out there were approximately 10,000 more ration cards than actual refugees in each of the camps. Particularly when a refugee influx is continuing, controlling the feeding population remains difficult even after a registration has been carried out.

Even though there was over-distribution of food in Benaco, this is not to say that all refugees benefited equally from this. Some communes undoubtedly benefited more than others, and

within those communes, it is highly likely that those who had presented themselves as leaders benefited the most. At the same time that the overall feeding population increased in May, the feeding population of certain communes actually decreased. None of the refugees left the camp during that time.

Food distribution by community leaders, or with the assistance of community leaders, is often seen as the only option if food distribution has to start immediately. If the beneficiary population is not well known, this allows the more powerful, or even criminal, members of the society to come forward and take control. Powerful leaders' hugely increase their commune size, whilst less powerful communes may receive less than their entitlements. These leaders' may also induce their own people to make do with less than the ration they are entitled to so food aid can be used for other purposes. In this way, food distribution can reinforce or distort the power relations that existed in the country of origin.

In Benaco, the commune leaders were extremely powerful people within their society and in many cases had been implicated in, or even directly responsible for, the genocide that occurred in Rwanda during April. These same leaders were used by UNHCR and NGOs to assist in food distribution effectively reinforcing their power within their communities. It could be argued that the reason many of the commune leaders were present in the camp was to establish a base from which to organise their men before return to Rwanda to fight the RPF. It is likely that leaders gave priority to men closely allied to their political cause and sold food for the same reason. Food effectively became a political weapon, which perpetuated the instability that refugees had experienced in Rwanda, and reinforced the power imbalance that caused the conflict (Ben Lark, UNHCR, personal communication).

The difficulty of estimating how much food was actually received

It is clear that there were wide variations in the size of ration, as measured by energy content, between different communes, though it has to be said that the range and median values of these variation were dependent upon the source of information used. For instance, information from distribution reports indicated that the daily energy content of the ration varied between 1,286 kcals and 3,183 kcals. The average number of kcals provided between the 19th of May and the 11th of June would have been 2,341 kcals. In comparison, information obtained by MSF-F from its Food Basket Monitoring indicated that the energy provided by the general ration varied from as low as 1,248 kcals to as much as 3,343 kcals. In addition,

when different communes were monitored on the same day, the ration received by three different communes varied between 2,240,1680 and 1,344 kcals. MSF-H had found that for the first month refugees received on average 2,700 kcals/day.

Considering the problems associated with food distribution in the initial stages of an emergency it is important that agencies agree on the appropriate methods for estimating how much food families actually receive, as there is a very real risk that agencies will simply rely on that set of information which most clearly supports their arguments.

6. Issues for Refugee Programmes Elsewhere

Under the WFP/UNHCR arrangements relating to refugee food aid UNHCR is responsible for food distribution and monitoring nutritional status. However, controlling and monitoring food distribution has received little attention in the past. UNHCR funds an NGO to distribute food with limited involvement of UNHCR field staff. Food distribution is rarely related directly to the nutritional status of the population. Within UNHCR different staff or sections are involved in these two aspects of the programme: the nutritionist in the Programme and Technical Support Section in Geneva is involved in monitoring nutritional status, whereas the Food Unit and the Logistics section are involved in the logistical aspects of food supply and distribution. In the field, one group of NGOs is funded to carry out general ration distributions and another group to carry out those activities which are generally seen as 'typical nutrition activities' ie. supplementary feeding and nutritional surveillance.

When high levels of malnutrition occur in a refugee population these are often assumed to reflect upon the performance of the system for supplying of general rations rather than distribution methods employed. Evidence from refugee camps in Kenya shows that the total quantity of food distributed in a camp does not necessarily relate to the nutritional status of a population. Here the apparent population could be double the actual population whilst the prevalence of malnutrition rates was extremely high (30-40% < 80% weight-for-height). One of the main causes of malnutrition in these camps was the inequality of the food distribution system. When the food distribution system was changed total food supply decreased but so did malnutrition rates.

Nutritionists working in refugee camps for NGOs undertaking health programmes may

calculate the number of calories received by an individual by weighing the ration received for a random number of families and relate this to the nutritional status of the population. When the nutritional content of the ration is less than what the refugees are entitled to this is often interpreted in relation to the supply of food aid to the camp not the distribution process itself. Key questions such as:

- # Was the low ration a result of low food availability in the camp?
- # Was food available but not distributed?
- # Was food not distributed equally?
- # Was food provided but not accepted by the refugees?

often cannot be answered by NGOs implementing health programmes as they are not in a position to 'monitor' the NGO responsible for distributing the general ration and often do not have access to information on the entire food chain. Health NGOs and UNHCR also have different objectives in distribution monitoring. Whilst UNHCR ought to be monitoring the performance of the system for distributing general rations as well as how much food refugees actually receive, health NGOs are concerned, from a nutritional perspective, with how much food refugees receive and how it is used.

Only UNHCR is in a position to combine information on all aspects of food and nutrition for refugees. As a result of its joint responsibility for preparing the FASREP it should receive information on food supply to the Extended Delivery Point. As the effective contracting and supervising agency of the NGOs distributing the general ration, it should receive information on actual food distributions. As the coordinating and in some cases contracting agency for the NGOs involved in health programmes, UNHCR should receive information on food distributed at the distribution site and the sale or exchange of food in the market and the results of nutritional surveillance. Despite its position in relation to these various agencies information on all aspects of the food aid provided in refugee camps is not routinely analysed by UNHCR to assess the causes of food or nutritional problems and where improvement is necessary. This is partly the result of organisational arrangements within UNHCR but it also stems from the complexities of food distribution and the fact that these complexities have not been sufficiently recognised or investigated. Particularly during the first months following a refugee influx there is a lack of control and monitoring of what happens during food distribution. Such difficulties need to be better addressed rather than be allowed to fester and become the source of inter-agency differences and threats to the

well-being of the refugees.

Controlling and monitoring food distribution

Food distribution in the initial stages of a refugee influx is extremely difficult. Because of the difficulty of organising formal censuses and registrations there is usually a period of several months where food has to be distributed to unregistered populations about which little is known with respect to social organisation, customs and power relations within the society. In such situations the assistance of refugee representatives is usually essential in carrying out the food distribution. But if the population is not well known to those providing assistance, how can abuse by powerful sections of the population be prevented? Without knowledge of the normal functioning of society in the refugees home country, normal leadership structures, and how these have been affected by the conflict or famine that caused the refugee influx, it is extremely difficult to set up a distribution system with the help of refugees that ensures fair and equitable distributions. Recent refugee operations in Kenya, Tanzania, and now Zaire, show that food distributions with refugee participation have been abused by those who presented themselves as leaders with unfair distribution practices being the result.

Alternatives must therefore be found. If the population is known to those providing assistance, refugee representatives must be selected who are likely to distribute food fairly. They must be selected by the agency, or traditional elders, rather than simply inviting leaders to come forward and accepting them without question. It is more likely, however, that the refugee population is not well known, or that it will take time to understand the dynamics of the refugee camp. Refugee representatives other than supposed leaders could be used as the conduits for the assistance provided. For instance, population demographics could be used to provide every woman with a certain number of rations, regardless of family size, on the assumption that women are likely to distribute food more equitably among the population.

If alternatives to distribution by leaders cannot be found immediately, it must be recognised that food distributions are unlikely to be fair, and the most vulnerable sections of the population must be catered for by other programmes. The programme of distributing dry rations to all under fives by NGOs involved in health programmes would be an example of

such an approach.

However, to gain control of food distribution, formal registration and distribution of ration cards should be carried out as soon as possible as this is fundamental to the establishment of a fair and equitable general ration. Ensuring that UNHCR, perhaps with the support of other agencies, has the capacity to mount such registrations during an influx or immediately thereafter and to monitor the distribution process more closely than has been the case, is vital. UNHCR has already taken considerable steps to improve registration of refugees. The Emergency Unit has stockpiled the items necessary for registration and has prepared registration guidelines for field staff. A registration expert has been appointed in Nairobi, who can be deployed immediately when needed. For these reasons, registrations could be carried out only 2 months after refugees arrived in Ngara - significantly quicker than was the case with other refugee populations.

Some basic indicators need to be routinely monitored. Such indicators ought to include:

- # differences between feeding population/registered population/actual population
- # analysis of over or under distributions and who benefits
- # what ration do refugees actually receive
- # what do refugees actually eat

All logistical aspects such as food leaving the warehouse, pre-positioning on distribution sites, actual number of people coming for distribution and amount distributed, scooping of rations, food lost, damaged and returns to the warehouse need to be accurately monitored. If this is to be carried out effectively it will require the employment of more monitors and clerks at the warehouses and distribution sites by UNHCR.

Ideally, as the refugee operation becomes protracted, refugees should participate increasingly in the process of food distribution. UNHCR would have shown clear control initially, but after some time the refugee population will be better known, and a participatory system can be implemented that is likely to work. Examples of this would be block allocations to selected food committees representing the different sections in the camp, or distribution to small groups of refugees who would then divide the food between themselves. This system is preferable in the end as there is greater beneficiary responsibility in food distribution, and the process is less costly and labour intensive. It will still however,

require close monitoring by UNHCR to prevent abuse.

Nutrition monitoring

NGOs undertaking health programmes in refugee camps have a substantial role to play in nutrition monitoring. An important aspect of such monitoring is the assessment of the amount of food that refugees actually receive. The calculation of the nutritional contents of the ration supplied is problematic in most refugee situations. Only where there is an accurately registered population with every family holding a ration card and food is distributed equally, can this be a simple calculation of total food supplied divided by the population. This is rarely the case, especially in the first months following a refugee influx. Even in the most organised food distribution systems, there is always a difference between the population fed and the actual population. MSF has already institutionalised Food Basket Monitoring as an essential aspect of their refugee assistance programmes. This should become general practice in all refugee situations with the methodology agreed on between NGOs and UNHCR. Before this can happen however, it has to be recognised, that food distribution reports cannot tell accurately the amount of food received by refugees, or whether every refugee receives the same amount. Inequalities in food distribution are likely to occur to some extent in all refugee situations.

Market monitoring was seen as an essential aspect of nutrition monitoring in Tanzania. As the exchange of refugee food rations for other food or non-food items is a general practice, there should be some knowledge about what commodities are exchanged, and the 'terms of trade' between items commonly sold and bought. This would provide a better picture of what food refugees will eventually consume and can also give valuable information on the acceptability of the commodities being provided in the general ration.

These two types of information, together with morbidity and mortality rates, and entries into the feeding programme, would give a good picture of changes, or even expected changes, in the nutritional condition of the population. Large scale nutritional surveys would still be needed to confirm information provided by other indicators, but would not need to be carried out as frequently.

Selective feeding as a preventive measure?

The supplementary feeding programmes in Benaco highlighted several issues that will require further consideration by agencies. Should wet supplementary feeding programmes be an essential part of the standard refugee relief 'package' regardless of the nutritional condition of the beneficiaries? If the nutritional status of the population is good, are selective feeding programmes for all under fives justified to prevent malnutrition?

If we recognise that there are likely to be problems in food supply and distribution in the first months of an operation, targeting the most vulnerable to malnutrition with a separate programme would seem to be justified. This requires a major re-thinking of supplementary feeding policy by NGOs involved in health activities as a programme to feed all under fives is of a much larger scale than a supplementary feeding programme for malnourished children alone. The resourcing of supplementary food by UNHCR and NGOs would also appear to need re-thinking as such programmes can only be effective in preventing increases in malnutrition if implemented quickly. In most cases this would mean funding NGOs to resource and transport the food to the camps. For the NGOs this would mean a much larger logistical input than is required for their current programmes. Finally, WFP should be more realistic and less defensive about the possibility of breaks in the food pipeline in the first months following a major refugee influx and the need for the agencies directly responsible for the well being of the refugees to plan and establish programmes that allow for such eventualities. For its part UNHCR must address its responsibilities in relation to the establishment of distribution systems which are fair and equitable.

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Relief and Rehabilitation Network

The objective of the Relief and Rehabilitation Network (RRN) is to facilitate the exchange of professional information and experience between the personnel of NGOs and other agencies involved in the provision of relief and rehabilitation assistance. Members of the Network are either nominated by their agency or may apply on an individual basis. Each year, RRN members receive four mailings in either English or French. A Newsletter and Network Papers are mailed to members every March and September and 'State of the Art' Reviews on topics in the relief and rehabilitation field every June and December. In addition, RRN members are able to obtain advice on technical and operational problems they are facing from the RRN staff in London. A modest charge is made for membership with rates varying in the case of agency-nominated members depending on the type of agency.

The RRN is operated by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) in conjunction with the European Association of Non-Governmental Organisations for Food Aid and Emergency Relief (EuronAid). ODI is an independent centre for development research and a forum for policy discussion on issues affecting economic relations between the North and South and social and economic policies within developing countries. EuronAid provides logistics and financing services to NGOs using EC food aid in their relief and development programmes. It has 25 member agencies and four with observer status. Its offices are located in the Hague.

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