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Full Report

of the

Tripartite (UNICEF/UNHCR/WFP) Study of the Great Lakes Emergency Operation

September 1996 - 1997

Rome, June 1998

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Introduction

1. The objective of the joint WFP/UNHCR/UNICEF mission was to examine operational aspects of humanitarian assistance co-ordination in the Great Lakes region in order:
 - to contribute to a shared regional inter-institutional process of self-evaluation which will prioritise and shape work to improve inter-agency co-ordination of humanitarian assistance appropriate to the changing context, and
 - to document lessons for broader application to humanitarian assistance.

The focus of the study was in the main limited to the three primary United Nations operational agencies: UNHCR, WFP and UNICEF.

2. Over a period of three weeks the Mission visited six countries of the Region (Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo) and also held consultations at the headquarters of the three agencies in Rome, Geneva, and New York. In the field the Mission met with the regional directors/managers and country representatives of the three agencies and with those staff of the three agencies who, working at regional, country and field level in areas such as communications, logistics, programming, security and information, were most closely concerned with the implementation of the various emergency programmes. Following the field visit, the team prepared a draft report which was subsequently revised to take account of comments made by operations and evaluation managers in the headquarters of the three agencies. The mission composition and itinerary are attached as Annex I. Key documents considered by the mission are listed in Annex II, and are available upon request to the evaluation sections of WFP Rome, UNHCR Geneva and UNICEF New York.

3. The Mission also interviewed officials of other United Nations agencies, including UNDP Resident Co-ordinators and United Nations Humanitarian Co-ordinators. It met with NGOs in Rwanda, and with national government officials in Burundi. In Tanzania, the Mission met with members of the Joint Food Aid Assessment Mission of the Great Lakes Region (JFAM) and attended part of its debriefing. Although the Tripartite team was unable to meet in the field with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Working Group/Department of Humanitarian Affairs mission (IASC/DHA Mission), which was studying strategic humanitarian co-ordination in the Great Lakes Region, it did subsequently have the opportunity for an extensive exchange of views.

4. The report which follows comprises three sections: a) introduction; b) general findings and observations on policy matters together with specific recommendations for action; c) concluding remarks. The sectors covered by the report are: general (matters cutting across sectoral lines); logistics; telecommunications/information technology; programming (including planning, implementation, and monitoring); organisation and staffing; security; and information management.

Findings and Recommendations - GENERAL

5. The Mission found that the quantity and quality of the formal and informal co-operation in the field of operations among UNICEF, WFP and UNHCR operational staff were greater than anticipated. Agreements in the form of operational plans, MOUs (Memorandum of Understanding) and Technical Agreements which covered specific sectors such as logistics and telecommunications were concluded as a result of regional, country-level, and local initiatives. Subsequently, a Global MOU was signed between the Headquarters of WFP and UNICEF together with a Global Technical Agreement covering radio communications.

6. More significant, from the point of view of future co-ordinated activities, was the increased number of joint activities undertaken by the three agencies, in which, for a finite time and for specific purposes, they merged their identities. Informal arrangements included: some regional and local logistics control centres employing shared resources; an agreement for shared telecommunications connectivity and frequencies; joint use of equipment and personnel; and undertakings for common warehouse, office and other facilities. Subsequently, as the level of emergency activity in the region has decreased, there has been a concerted effort by the agencies to build upon experience and to develop agreed written procedures to guide the establishment of joint activities in future emergency operations.

7. The tripartite exercise also represents an attempt to document these co-operative efforts more systematically, to highlight the more promising initiatives and to suggest guidelines for follow-up action. Such action is essential, and it must be clearly stated at the outset that the resources required to implement the recommendations made will be considerable.

8. In this, as in previous emergency operations, divergences of views between UN agency officers sometimes impeded co-ordination. When such differences occurred, even signed agreements and MOUs could do little to overcome them and harmonise agency operations. Another recurring difficulty was the competition among the individual United Nations agencies to promote their own identity for fund-raising purposes. That said, it is acknowledged that these problems are due in part to human nature and the competition for funds in the current climate of diminishing resources for international emergency assistance operations.

9. It is precisely these “natural” characteristics of the international emergency assistance system, however, that serve to emphasise the importance of the achievements of the personnel of the three agencies in the Great Lakes emergency operation in developing the new formal and informal modalities of operational co-ordination and joint action which are discussed in this report.

10. It was often difficult to ascertain, both within the individual agencies and within the system as a whole, where responsibility for concerted action lay and at what level and under whose responsibility key strategic decisions (those, for instance, relating to the delivery of supplies or food to certain groups which might have political or security implications) were taken in those countries. Where the post of Humanitarian Co-ordinator existed, it often seemed that the lack of resources to support the office diminished its authority, and, although being above the action should ostensibly be an advantage, it was often, in fact, a handicap. At this, as at other levels, the effectiveness of the co-ordination depended very much on the flexibility and task orientation of those concerned. Although the detailed examination of the question of *strategic* co-ordination was properly the task of the IASC/DHA mission, the Tripartite Mission permitted itself to comment on such co-ordination when it clearly had a direct relation to operational matters.

11. It was observed that in general, the closer one gets to the physical ‘action’ the clearer

the responsibilities among the agencies appeared defined, and the more coherent and co-ordinated the decision-taking mechanism, and the more orderly the manner in which the decisions were implemented. At this level, administrators were more often than not focused on the task at hand.

12. Either because of their size or their suddenness, there are emergency situations where, in the very early stages, the demand by individual agencies for immediate large scale resources is bound to exceed their availability. At such times, the agencies have often relied on standby arrangements with a selected number of governmental or non-governmental agencies (that is, the Norwegian Refugee Council, ODA, Swiss Disaster Relief, etc.), in order to provide specialised services - service 'packages' - that complement the agencies' efforts. In the Great Lakes operation however, when packages were donated to one agency alone, the single agency 'ownership' sometimes tended to hinder the establishment of joint or co-ordinated operations. Such was the case in the early stages of the Goma and Kisangani logistics operations, for example.

Recommendation: The headquarters logistics sections in UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP should explore the modalities for establishing common stand-by arrangements with donors. Service packages could thus be made available to all three agencies simultaneously when joint operations arrangements are concluded, such as the establishment of a joint aircell, common communications centre or warehouse facility.

13. In the nineties, in an era of fast-moving, dramatic conflict emergencies, the public profile of an emergency organisation assumed a new importance. If an organisation is successful in establishing an early, visible presence when the drama was at its height, then the material support that it received increased significantly. The need to be first or to be seen in the front line, and the need for an agency's assistance to have a short-term impact, have greatly increased. Co-operation, co-ordination and especially joint action, however, all involve sharing the limelight, and although that may also mean delivering greater quantities of aid more effectively, as far as fund-raising potential is concerned it frequently blurs the image of an agency.

Recommendation: The Mission wishes to emphasise the need, in the three agencies, for clear signals from the top levels of management regarding the balance between image and action, and the need for those signals to reach and to be clearly understood at the end of the chain of command.

14. It was noted that a common *perception* among emergency aid officials was that UNICEF appeared to be a somewhat reluctant participant in emergency operations, and that when it did participate, its responses tended to be considerably slower than those of other agencies. What was sometimes true, as for example at Kisangani and Tingi Tingi, was that UNICEF was the first present, but its relatively modest contribution at that stage was soon overshadowed and merged into a much larger scale operation, where refugee and feeding activities necessarily dominated the programme.

15. This situation was typically true in the latter half of 1996 when, with the commencement of the civil war in Eastern DRC, a new phase in the Great Lakes emergency operation began. The sudden movements of large numbers of refugees and IDPs (internally displaced persons) tended to bring UNHCR's protection and relief activities, and WFP's logistics and feeding operations into the forefront of the programme. As the WFP and HCR operations escalated with their significantly superior resources, UNICEF's efforts were merged

into this larger operation. Food, shelter, protection and transport becoming the primary operational concerns and certainly attracting the bulk of donor funding. The result was that UNICEF was not always included at that stage as a full partner in those cases where local logistics control centres or programming arrangements (that is, MOVCONS (Movement Control Centres) or joint workplans) were established. Then, when the local situation normalised and the refugees/IDPs returned or re-located, the focus of the local community and the governmental authorities turned to reconstruction of infrastructure and the re-establishment of schools and health and other social services. Emergency water supply then had to be developed into community water supply, for example. Consequently, when emergency operations wound down and rehabilitation and reconstruction activities were commenced, UNICEF, on occasions with very little advance notice, and without necessarily having been involved in the emergency planning (as occurred in Kivu Province DRC), was expected to take over the operations.

Recommendation: In the interest of programme continuity and to hasten normalisation and the resumption of basic social services in conflict-affected areas, the Mission recommends that all three agencies be actively involved in planning and co-ordinating activities from the outset of complex emergency operations (that is, not only in the development of the programme proper, but also the entry and exit strategies). In particular, because UNICEF usually has a key role during the transitional phase of re-establishing basic services, it should be a partner in planning of humanitarian relief even in those situations where, and at stages when, it does not have a substantial role to play in those operations. This recommendation could well apply to all aspects (including the technical aspects) of operational planning associated with the Emergency.

Findings and Recommendations – LOGISTICS

16. After the outbreak of civil war in September/October 1996 the objectives of the emergency programme in eastern DRC changed considerably. Over a million (mostly) Rwandan refugees suddenly fled the fighting to return to their places of origin or to move deeper into eastern DRC, necessitating the re-positioning of aid agencies and the re-routing of assistance. In eastern DRC logistics and telecommunications became major problems since large numbers of refugees and IDPs had to be assisted and protected, and then moved out of harm's way and/or returned to their place of origin, amidst the ongoing hostilities.

17. As significant numbers of people migrated or were driven to a particular location, the three agencies (or in some instances, the 'two' agencies, UNHCR and WFP) were able to agree on an ad hoc assignment of roles which corresponded to the funding, personnel and equipment resources at hand, available to each party at that location. Whichever agency had the formal designation 'lead agency' did not matter, for significant parts of the operation were carried out through local joint arrangements, utilising shared staff, equipment and funding.

18. At the *regional* level in Kampala in December 1996, DHA, UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP established a United Nations Joint Logistics Centre (UNJLC). Originally intended primarily as a liaison point for the United Nations multinational force (MNF) briefly deployed to the region, the UNJLC was used to process information on logistics operations of the three operational agencies, and more broadly for the common management of their logistics operations throughout the region. This unit held responsibility for the co-ordination of incoming freight and support/forwarding to the *field* locations. Procedures for the establishment of UNJLCs in future emergency operations

were agreed in draft form by the logistics sections of the three agencies in February 1997. They have not, however, been amended to incorporate the experience since that time. In particular, for example, they do not at the present time address such issues as logistics contingency planning and the maintenance of strategic stocks.

19. The individual field operations which WFP and UNHCR established for the first time in the Great Lakes emergency in locations such as Kisangani, Goma, Entebbe, Mbandaka, Mwanza and Brazzaville were called MOVCONs (for Movement Control Centres). Each had its own specific form and content, developed to address the particular logistics problems encountered in area covered by that operation. The implications of the establishment of MOVCONs merit further comment. It is often the inconsistency between local, country and/or regional lead agency designations, on the one hand, and the actual capabilities and resources of the agencies on the ground, on the other, that can cause disagreements among United Nations operational partners. Through UNJLC, MOVCONs, and similar arrangements, any combination of agencies can temporarily pool personnel and equipment resources to manage an aircell or barge or trucking operation in a manner that is not only efficient and economic, but is also not threatening to those agencies involved. Further, the mix of inputs or assignment of responsibilities (the tasking of aircraft, the management of warehouses, etc.) does not prejudice the formulation of arrangements in the establishment of joint logistics operations in the next operation in a new location, several weeks or months hence, since its parameters will almost certainly be different.

20. Where the Humanitarian or Resident Co-ordinator system is the preferred means for co-ordination of a United Nations emergency programme, the assignment of operational roles among the agencies in the very early stages can sometimes be a sensitive and acrimonious process, particularly when the media coverage is high and 'visibility' is important. Occasionally, because these roles assigned in the field did not correspond to 'lead agency' designations or to global agency mandates, there were other inter-agency disagreements. But these were rare, and in the main, the Mission observed that joint activities of this kind more often than not facilitated the work of both the Humanitarian/Resident Co-ordinator and the 'lead agency' concerned. UNJLC and MOVCONs, in particular, help to reduce the potential for disagreement by providing a framework for co-ordination which has a precedent. At the local levels – both country and sub-office – where joint logistics operations were not established, logistics staff of the three agencies often operated independently and without regular meetings and exchanges of information.

Recommendation: The Mission recommends the eventual incorporation of the UNJLC document into the global inter-agency MOUs between the three agencies.

Recommendation: The Mission recommends that the concepts and procedures underlying UNJLC and MOVCON be incorporated into the internal logistics manuals of the three agencies and future directives reflect a strong bias towards the establishment of common logistics services and premises generally, but particularly in countries where there are complex emergency operations.

Recommendation: The Mission recommends that each agency formally adopt the MOVCON procedures which are presently being developed by the respective logistics sections, and determine a method of funding, perhaps from standing arrangements with donors or the use of agency emergency reserve funds, of the early common costs. Medium and longer term common costs could be funded from inter-agency consolidated appeals.

Recommendation: The practice of selecting one agency to assume a lead role in local operations should be encouraged by the three agencies, along with the routine establishment of informal arrangements for joint operations.

21. In spite of the successes of the joint logistics operations, there were certain instances in the Great Lakes emergency programme where warehouses, repair facilities, offices and transport equipment and even forwarding agents were unnecessarily duplicated by the three agencies, resulting in wasted resources. This observation echoes the findings of the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda. The costs of transport services (trucking services and air charter contract for both passenger and cargo aircraft) were unnecessarily inflated when agencies, in the heat of the moment at the start of operations, bid against each other for the same equipment and/or services. Complicating this problem is the fact that for air operations UNHCR usually purchases 'package' aircell services including tasking, loading, etc., whereas WFP usually bids on planes and aircrews only. During the start-up of air operations in the Great Lakes emergency, the agencies also tended to negotiate independently with the relevant governmental authorities on airport taxes and landing fees, with the result that rates have varied considerably. In much of the Great Lakes emergency operation, particular in the early stages, the management of United Nations passenger aircraft in support of emergency operations often proved problematic. Procedures were often inefficient and costs were unacceptably high. Agencies often had duplicate capacity, so planes flew lightly loaded or even empty in a few instances. In Rwanda, however, such problems were largely overcome by the establishment by the three agencies of an arrangement previously used in Ethiopia: a common air service for the transport of staff. A similar arrangement was established for the transport of United Nations staff between Nairobi, Kampala, Goma, Kigali and Bujumbura. This latter undertaking became known as UNCAS (United Nations Common Air Service).

Recommendation: The Mission recommends that procedures be agreed among the three agencies for common tenders for transport contracts.

Recommendation: The Mission recommends the adoption by the three agencies of a common air charter agreement, similar to that already adopted by the Field Administration and Logistics Division of DPKO. This agreement should include a common inter-agency position on United Nations privileges and immunities as they apply to airport taxes and fees. When possible one United Nations-wide agreement should be jointly negotiated.

Recommendation: The Mission recommends that the logistics sections of the three agencies develop agreed procedures for the establishment of United Nations common passenger services in future emergency operations.

Recommendation: The Mission recommends that regular inter-agency logistics staff meetings be held at the country and sub-office level, and that provision for such meetings be included in relevant local and country-level MOUs and in joint workplans.

22. Throughout calendar 1997 each of the three agencies has been independently developing new and/or refining existing computerised commodity tracking systems (CTS) tailored to its particular requirements. To some extent, these independent development tracks reflect the differing requirements of the three organisations. UNICEF handles over 2,000 items, a large number, but by no means all, directly through its Copenhagen warehouse, others purchased and shipped locally. WFP has far fewer types of commodities or 'items', but purchases and/or ships from many different points, and, of course, in far greater bulk. Nevertheless, in spite of these differences - and this

was particularly true in the large and complex Great Lakes operation - each of the three agencies has an interest in tracking commodities in the other agencies' supply chains. Moreover, as the United Nations moves toward a system of common services and premises in the field, the three agencies' interests in having access to information in each other's CTS systems will grow. Where each of the agencies are already involved in the development of joint and individual systems for logistics support to the field it is necessary to establish regular contact among the three teams for the development of a clear understanding of commodity tracking, financial and programme management systems thus ensuring compatibility. This work should eventually develop a close working relationships between the three agencies and their respective NGO implementing partners, to ensure consolidated reporting capacities. Care must be taken to obtain an overview of each agency's own particular logistics chain and mix of supplies. WFP for example has for some years been endeavouring to standardise terminology, allocation codes, etc., into a unified 'system' for tracking food items from the sourcing to the end distribution points. UNICEF is in the stages of developing its own program manager system (ProMS) and implementing as its financial and logistics control package (SAP) within its Supply Division. The complexity of the Great Lakes emergency operation has generated the first sustained effort among the three agencies to exchange information on their respective requirements, including a logistics CTS (commodity tracking systems) workshop in Kampala in May 1997.

Recommendation: The Mission recommends that the CTS design teams of the three agencies work closely together in the coming months to ensure transparency and mutual accessibility in their respective systems. In particular, the Mission recommends the formation of a tripartite CTS working group to ensure constant exchanges of information and maximum systems compatibility.

Findings and Recommendations -TELECOMMUNICATIONS

23. Instant voice communications are critical to the conduct of humanitarian assistance operations in the high-risk security environments of conflict emergencies. The outbreak of civil war in Eastern DRC in October-November 1996 posed severe challenges to the three agencies' voice and data communications systems. In particular, security concerns for staff in remote locations (discussed later in the section on security), several large-scale evacuations and the co-ordination of complex inter-agency air, road, rail and water logistics exercises placed enormous demands on these systems. All three agencies actively participate in the United Nation's Inter-Agency Telecommunications Advisory Committee (ITAC), a group consisting of 22 UN agencies and programmes whose focus is to promote United Nations co-ordination in telecommunications. For the past several years UNHCR, with large numbers of staff in high risk situations, has led the three agencies in acquiring and developing radio voice communications capability, particularly in the field of VHF systems. In order to support logistics operations and to track shipments of relief goods in remote locations, however, the timely, dependable communication of text and data (tables, spreadsheets, etc.) is essential. WFP in the Great Lakes operation over the past 2-3 years, has developed a means to accomplish this efficiently and cheaply using computers linked by HF radio to the Internet. This 'Deep Field Mailing System' (DFMS) is also now being used in remote locations by UNICEF, and has attracted wide attention in the international emergency assistance community.

24. Building upon the experience in the Great Lakes over the past year, all three agencies have begun to use the regional UN logistics and telecommunications meetings together with

the Inter-agency Telecommunications Advisory Council (ITAC) to standardise their communications systems in both voice and data areas and to make them compatible. The possibility now exists (and in certain major international emergency assistance operations has to some extent already been exploited) whereby satellite earth stations can quickly link *any* part of the globe with *all* of the United Nations operational agencies. Emergency staff with a laptop will be able to connect to local servers to send voice, text, data and pictures via the internet HF or VHF radio, satellite or telephone to locations globally. The rate at which change is occurring in the United Nations system and globally in the field of telecommunications is astounding. This implies a need for constant review in order to ensure that the most appropriate and cost-effective solutions are retained.

25. Upon its return from the field visit the Mission, in November and early December 1997, discussed and drafted a recommendation proposing that the three agencies agree to connect their long distance telecommunications systems to the existing Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) satellite network in Brindisi, Italy. In an agreement reached under the aegis of ITAC, this additional capacity was made available in mid-December, although to date it has not been utilised to any great extent.

26. On the basis of their co-operation in the field of telecommunications in the Great Lakes operation, UNICEF and WFP recently concluded a technical agreement on field telecommunications and support. The agreement provides for sharing connectivity resources, technical support, administration, for standardising on equipment specifications and strategic telecommunications stocks, and for joint TC/IT training. The Mission concludes that significant benefits have accrued to the two agencies as a result of this agreement. It was also recommended that WFP and UNICEF senior management approve and sign a comprehensive bilateral technical agreement on field telecommunications, global co-ordination and mutual assistance (in field of telecommunications), which was being drafted in Kampala by staff of WFP Kampala and UNICEF NYHQ at the time of the Mission. The agreement was subsequently completed and signed by UNICEF and WFP in March 1998 as a technical agreement in support of the Global MOU.

Recommendation: In the interest of establishing a global, inter-operable telecommunications system for the international emergency assistance community the Mission recommends that the senior management of all three agencies support the expansion of their existing bilateral global MOUs, to include telecommunications technical agreements developed among these three and other agencies, and including the agencies' major implementing partners.

22. On a less positive note, the Mission observed that even as the three agencies are finding ways to co-operate in the creation of inter-operable TC/IT systems, steps are being taken to cut back the field technical staff necessary to support these systems. It is ironic that the objective of this action is to reduce direct support costs, since these reductions will result in substantially higher voice and data communication charges – much greater than the intended personnel cost savings. For example, if WFP had used INMARSAT mini-phones to handle its volume electronic mail in the Great Lakes region last year, instead of using its DFMS network, the Programme would have spent an additional 500,000 USD, a sum far larger than the proposed personnel cost savings for the coming year. UNICEF, as part of the new technical co-operation between the agencies, has provided two technicians (under an agreement with the

Norwegian Refugee Council) to ensure continued technical support. However, UNICEF's provision of support staff for DFMS is only a temporary measure and a partial solution.

Findings and Recommendations - PLANNING/PROGRAMMING/MONITORING

28. An MOU, LOU (Letter of Understanding), joint workplan or operations plan expresses an intent: it does not necessarily ensure co-ordination. It presupposes that the structures of the agency emergency programmes involved are sufficiently compatible to permit a minimum level of co-ordination. An MOU can take no account of human nature, and the phrase that the Mission heard repeated most often (in relation to almost all of the aspects of operational co-ordination that were studied) was 'it depends on personalities'. 'It' in this case represents the success or failure of a particular undertaking. Nevertheless, in its discussions with agency programming officers, the Mission found that these different written agreements were usually taken very seriously. Generally, those with whom the Mission talked thought that working at the outset of planning/programming within the framework of a written agreement (MOU, LOU, etc.) had been useful. The Mission was told that even draft MOUs sometimes signalled to staff in the field that they would begin to find efficiencies in combining resources and eliminating redundant capacities.

29. More often than not, particularly at the local level, these agreements had provided a framework for co-operation for the duration of subsequent operations. In the case of the Goma Joint Workplan involving WFP and UNHCR, the document was scrupulously updated on two subsequent occasions. The second extension was still in force when the war in DRC broke out and the target population fled. The Joint Operations Plan for Humanitarian Assistance in Burundi, brokered by the United Nations Humanitarian Co-ordinator and involving all three agencies, assigned lead roles to each of the agencies in critical operational areas. In other situations the Mission noted the effectiveness of the practice of the United Nations co-ordinator's designation of one agency to take the lead role in local operations, particularly when this designation is accompanied by the establishment of mechanisms for joint operations, such as MOVCONs. As one Resident Co-ordinator said: the question of which individual or organisation is responsible for the co-ordination is subordinate to the need for appropriate and effective co-ordination of the task in hand.

30. In spite of the numerous innovative forms of joint action in the Great Lakes operation, and the pace of political/military developments during the review period, there was a significant lack of joint contingency programme planning among the three agencies. The Mission believes that advance joint situational assessment and consideration of agency assets and possible roles, can at very least *advance*, even if it does not *ensure*, smooth programme co-ordination when the crisis occurs. An early consonance of views on these matters, in turn, can be beneficial for later co-ordination in the areas of security, logistics, common services/facilities, public information and even resourcing. Monitoring missions serve several purposes, of course, ensuring that basic needs are covered and that resources are used optimally in a changing environment. They are also an important tool to ensure that lessons are learnt and mistakes not repeated. They are also part of the institutional memory of the agencies. Whereas joint assessments of needs were routinely undertaken in the Great Lakes regional emergency operation, joint monitoring missions were not.

Recommendation: In emergency-prone areas, the Mission urges the three agencies to routinely undertake joint contingency planning. With a revised regional office structures

such planning might best be undertaken at that level, and should involve logistics, communications, information, security and programme staff.

Recommendation: In order to avoid or at least alleviate the impact of looming emergencies, or new phases of existing ones, the three agencies should also study and agree upon preparedness preventive measures, such as the pre-positioning of relief assistance, mass information campaigns (see below), or the facilitation of posting of human rights monitors.

Recommendation: At the onset of an emergency and at agreed intervals during implementation of major complex emergency programmes, the three agencies should as a matter of course field joint assessment/monitoring missions. Evaluations of complex emergency operations should also routinely be conducted jointly.

31. Several of the countrywide (Burundi, Rwanda) and some of the major local (Bukavu, Goma, Kigoma, Ngara) emergency operations in the Great Lakes, were covered at the outset by joint workplans or operations plans. Not all of these included all three major United Nations operational agencies, however, and these documents varied considerably in regard to the areas of responsibility and their degree of specificity. Where UNHCR and WFP were involved, the global MOU between the two agencies was often consciously used as a model. The Mission observed that quite often these local agreements did provide guidance for working relations for the duration of the operation in question, but even when they did not, the staff involved considered the exercise to have been useful in establishing agreed roles and responsibilities at the outset of an operation.

Recommendation: The Mission urges the development of joint operations/workplans as routine at the outset of emergency operations, at both the local and country levels. These exercises should involve all three agencies and, in addition to a clear delineation of the respective areas of responsibility, should, where possible, include agreement on the (initial) caseloads, the location of EDPs (extended delivery points) and an 'exit strategy' for the operation, including the elements of staff, communications, logistics and security.

32. As an extension to this it was noted that in the Great Lakes emergency operation, individual agencies have in certain local areas (and regionally in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo) taken unilateral decisions on the termination of operations and the withdrawal of staff, without due consideration for the effects of the withdrawal on the operations of other agencies. In these instances, advance warning might have provided the remaining agencies to better prepare for expanded roles and operations.

Recommendation: The Mission urges the three agencies to agree that decisions to terminate operations be taken in consultation with other effected agencies (and implementing partners) and that this policy be routinely incorporated into local and country-level MOUs and workplans.

33. The Mission noted a near universal perception in the Great Lakes Region that refugees received a far greater proportion of relief assistance than did internally displaced persons (IDPs) or civilian victims of conflict. Inevitably, this disproportionality was viewed, rightly or wrongly, by the new governing authorities in the region as a political position taken by the aid institutions and their donors. Disparities in the provision of relief to different caseloads can give rise to serious problems, affecting not only the well being of the beneficiaries, but also the

prospects for a long term solution and in some cases even the security of the emergency assistance staff involved.

Recommendation: To the extent possible, the levels and types of assistance to be provided to different categories of beneficiaries should be agreed mutually among the three agencies, at the outset of the operation or a new phase of the operation.

Findings and Recommendations - ORGANIZATION AND STAFFING

22. Within the three agencies, the management structure differs considerably from one agency to another, as for example in the roles and authority of Regional Offices. Moreover, the agencies are constantly rethinking and changing their lines of authority. The rationalisation or simplification of existing lines of authority within and across agencies may be difficult, but at least it should be possible to clarify and understand better those that do exist. Understanding and accepting these different roles and adapting to them are the keys to better exploitation of the existing agency strengths, and to the efficient use of the strengths of each across agency lines.

23. In effect, the regional offices were at the heart of the confusion concerning lines of command generally and the levels at which strategic decisions were made. First, the regional office for each agency covered a different geographic area. Thus, although the three agency regional offices with the largest coverage of the Great Lakes region were the most concerned, offices outside those regions were also interlocutors and colleagues. For example, WFP's Kenya Country Office, while not in the Great Lakes region, was involved in decisions regarding food brought in through the 'northern corridor', that is, through Mombasa. The differing responsibilities were also reflected in the different geographical locations of the agency regional offices (two in Nairobi and one in Kampala).

24. The most significant difference between the Regional Offices, however, is in the roles and responsibilities that each agency assigns to its regional office. While these roles are changing and evolving, the differences are at present very striking. At one end of the spectrum was the strong advisory role of the UNICEF Regional Office and at the other the strongly management-oriented Regional Office of WFP. The implications of this structure are that for practical purposes discussions on co-ordination, between, say WFP and UNICEF, would most effectively take place between the WFP Regional Director and the relevant UNICEF Country Representatives, which is not at first sight an obvious or natural line of communication. In spite of these apparent drawbacks, however, the regional approach should eventually permit more flexible use of staff and resources.

25. By contrast, the managers of agency *technical* matters in the Great Lakes operation appear to have been far more effective in getting around their 'lines of authority' problems, and in finding ways to foster co-ordination at the local, country and regional level. For example, as indicated above, the Mission was particularly impressed with the effectiveness of the MOVCON and UNJLC arrangements, and with the manner in which regional technical meetings (such as the UNHCR and WFP-sponsored Great Lakes regional logistics meetings) and global technical working groups (such as ITAC) have been used to encourage inter-agency fostering transparency, access, standardisation and co-ordination. However the actual control point for various technical activities and sub-activities, such as supply, logistics, commodity tracking, communications, etc. was sometimes located at different levels in different organisations.

Recommendation: The bilateral global MOUs which have been negotiated among the three agencies in the last few years have generally served to clarify respective roles. However they have not, so far, been able to address the ‘differing lines of authority’ issue. The Mission recommends that consideration be given by senior management of the three agencies to a process of reconciliation of the bilateral documents, incorporation of the various technical agreements into these documents, and their eventual consolidation into one tripartite MOU covering the working relationships of all three agencies. Technical agreements, such as that between WFP and UNICEF, should be incorporated into, or referenced in the bilateral global MOUs, and ultimately into the tripartite MOU.

26. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that considerable savings would be made, not only in emergency situations, but at country and possibly even regional level as well, if common basic services and common premises were routinely established. Security of premises, too, could be made more reliable, although others might argue that the concentration of assets in one place might be a risk. Significantly, in those instances where agencies were sited in the same building, inter-agency communication and understanding improved.

27. It is appreciated that the provision of a common service implies a notional loss of autonomy of action and a real reduction of flexibility, but much routine transportation and communication, for example, could be undertaken by a common system without affecting the specialised role which is entrusted to each agency. Common standing arrangements for service packages could be especially useful to accelerate in an orderly manner the establishment of joint activities at the outset of operations.

28. Numerous examples of sharing of facilities and services were encountered at field level (sub-country level). Such initiatives were universally welcomed and executed in a spirit of generosity and co-operation, but an organised system of sharing premises and services would be much more beneficial than an ad hoc one.

29. The discussion on establishment of United Nations common services and common premises in respect of development activities in the field is already well advanced in the General Assembly and the Joint Consultative Group on Policies (JCGP). UNDP has played a key role in these discussions, due in part to the functioning of the UNDP Resident Co-ordinator as the senior United Nations representative in most countries. However, in the Great Lakes emergency operation the three agencies have achieved economies by employing the concept of common services/facilities in respect of, inter alia, charter of passenger and cargo aircraft, trucking leases, warehouses, offices and communications facilities. It is important that the priorities of the three major operational agencies are accorded the highest importance, particularly in regard to plans for emergency-prone countries.

Recommendation: UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP should, through the aegis of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) develop a common position on procedures for the establishment of common services/facilities in emergency-prone countries. The MOVCON model developed in the Great Lakes operation might even be adapted to serve other areas than logistics, such as security and communications.

30. More serious impediments to the general process of co-operation and collaboration are the glaring disparities in incentives accorded to the staff of the various agencies (in this case the reference is to all the agencies and is not restricted to HCR, UNICEF and WFP). These disparities relate to the nature of the contracts awarded for similar jobs (SSA v FTTS); the interpretation of financial rules (advances, etc.); mission status (the staff of

interpretation of financial rules (advances, etc.); mission status (the staff of some agencies are granted mission status in emergency stations, others not); Rest and Recuperation (R&R or Procurement Missions) – some grant R&R to staff, some do not; and hazard pay (personnel of some agencies receive hazard pay when out of station, on leave, or on R&R). Apart from the blatant injustice of treating United Nations staff unequally when they are working together under extremely difficult conditions, such difficulties impede co-ordination. It is possible to explain why such discrepancies arise, but not why they are permitted to continue to exist. This point was made particularly strongly in Burundi, but was noted throughout the region.

Recommendation: The senior management of the three agencies should consider the standardisation of incentives and conditions of service, as well as forms and (to the extent possible) content of contracts for staff serving in emergency stations, and for contracts with NGO implementing partners.

31. A significant number of those whom the Mission met thought that inter-agency operational co-ordination had been easier at those project sites where UNHCR and WFP, at least, had utilised the same (usually NGO) implementing partners. All were agreed that greater uniformity in the terms of contractual agreements with the same implementing partner (or with different partners at the same location) was desirable.

Recommendation: The three agencies should where possible utilise the same implementing partners and a higher degree of uniformity in contractual agreements issued by the agencies to implementing partners should be sought.

Findings and Recommendations - SECURITY

44. The relief assistance environment in the region for the last four years has been characterised by more or less continuous armed conflict. At the time of the Mission's field visit, large-scale fighting had resumed in western Rwanda, and random conflict was occurring in eastern DRC and in Burundi. Even where it did not presently exist, key informants agreed that there was a potential for a resumption of ethnic conflict over much of the region. In such a situation the security of personnel is obviously a critical factor in the delivery of emergency aid in the region, and this in itself tends to ensure a high level of co-operation among the agencies in security matters. It was observed that in the countries of the Great Lakes Region communication facilities were often shared and security services extended wherever possible to provide as wide a coverage of aid personnel as resources would allow. However, this spirit of co-operation should not be confused with effective country-wide co-ordination of security (of personnel, of property and of premises).

45. While country security or crisis management teams functioned, because of the intensity of the work load and paucity of resources, they tended to be re-active rather than pro-active in their approach to security. There was a general concern for the security of staff and equipment (less so for premises), but this did not necessarily translate into *accountability* for security beyond those immediately concerned. And accountability for security could not and did not translate into material support for security. Significantly, the Flash Appeal for Congo Brazzaville contained no reference to security requirements, beyond a communication system for WFP. It seems to the Mission likely that the donors responding to such an appeal would have been prepared to give a high priority to the security of the agency staff delivering aid generated by that appeal, had they been asked.

46. Agency staff, both local and international, usually had hand sets, although not in all countries. They could call into a Field Security Officer (not necessarily from their own agency) or to a central control, although the volume of traffic on the net was frequently paralyzingly high and it was not always possible to switch frequencies or channels to call directly. Thus, the system probably would work much of the time, but there was little or no room for failure. Resources, paradoxically, were sometimes found to be almost prodigal, but not especially well co-ordinated. More often, they were frugal and well co-ordinated. There did not appear to any uniformity in security coverage in the various countries, except in one negative sense: no country in the region appeared to provide security training for agency and NGO staff.

47. One country, it was reported, had no fewer than 5 FSOs and 6 independent communications networks: another country had two efficient networks with one agency maintaining a 24-hour watch. A third country had two FSOs (from two different agencies) who covered all agencies and, apparently, the neighbouring country as well. Security information was routinely exchanged between agencies at regular intervals. Agencies tended to report serious security incidents immediately to headquarters level, where the exchange of information between the agencies is exceptionally reliable.

48. The progress of missions into insecure areas was carefully monitored at central level in-country, but once again this, with rare exceptions, tended to be an agency-based rather than a co-ordinated undertaking. In some cases individual drivers did not have radio communication equipment and convoy discipline was not always standardised. Evacuation plans varied in their plausibility (particularly those at country level) - the most disconcerting situation being that of Kinshasa, where it was agreed that evacuation was simply not possible. Who is accountable for the security of personnel in that case?

49. As with so many other aspects of operational co-ordination, security seemed to work best in the field at the sub-national level, where the concept of lead agency usually meant that that agency charged with security had the resources and the authority to carry out the task. This highlights the dilemma that confronts the three agencies in many countries. The United Nations Humanitarian or Resident Co-ordinator often does not have the resources to support a comprehensive security system. The will to participate in joint funding is too weak, and sometimes the resources too meagre to permit effective participation. The Designated Security Official finds him or herself bearing enormous responsibilities with scant resources (and, by implication, diminished authority) to carry out a crucial task. In these circumstances agencies have tended to establish parallel if not independent security systems. Sometimes these systems are considerably more sophisticated and effective than the central UN system. When these resources are shared laterally with other agencies, as they almost always are, the possibility for *overall* co-ordination is diminished and the development of contingency plans made more difficult. Where some degree of security protection is possible, agency accountability takes precedence over collective accountability: where that protection is not possible, as in the case of the evacuation plan cited above, collective accountability is then invoked. It appears to be a 'no win' situation for the common system.

50. The role of the individual Regional Offices in security matters reflects their role in other fields. Thus, at one end of the spectrum the UNICEF regional Office maintains an advisory role and at the other WFP is more directly concerned with country level security.

Generally, though, the collation of security information is carried out most effectively at headquarters level. This will probably remain the case until there is some coherence in the roles, location and geographic spread of the three agency 'Great Lakes' regional offices.

51. The Mission noted a considerable amount of *ad hoc* inter-agency co-operation on security arrangements, which took different forms in different countries, depending upon which agencies had Field Security Officers (FSOs) posted in-country and how pro-active was the United Nations Designated Security Official (DSO). There were disturbing constants, however: there were no FSOs for certain of the agencies in certain of the countries and/or critical field stations; little if any security training for agency staff had been undertaken; and most of the existing security contingency or evacuation plans were not updated. Rarely, in the countries visited, did the DSO know the location of all United Nations and NGO implementing partner emergency assistance staff. In the areas where periodic security meetings did take place, they frequently did not include NGO implementing partners. Those with responsibility in country for security are severely overworked and well aware of the shortcomings of the present system.

Recommendation: The Mission believes that in all six countries of the region there is an urgent requirement for the following actions:

- the posting by all three agencies of qualified security professionals at the country level AND in field posts with high-risk security environments;
- country and situation-specific security training for all field staff, including NGO implementing partners;
- the updating of security contingency and evacuation plans, including logistics options, and the clarification of the status of various categories of staff, including that of implementing partners;
- the creation and maintenance of a central list of the names and locations of all international staff and others in the region who are eligible for evacuation;
- in a situation of extreme emergency the status of local agency staff and of international staff of NGOs who are implementing partners remains confused, and needs to be clarified;
- the development of a mechanism at the regional level for co-ordination of the security plans and activities of all three agencies.

Recommendation: the Mission team strongly believes that greater accountability should exist at headquarters, regional and country levels for the security of staff working in high-risk environments and that this accountability should be clearly stated.

Recommendation: The Mission strongly feels that the security costs (staff, equipment, training, etc.) for agency staff and their implementing partners who are posted in high security risk situations should routinely be included in both flash appeals and consolidated inter-agency appeals as part of the 'cost of doing business' in such operations.

Findings and Recommendations - INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

52. There are three basic classes of information that have to be managed within the type of emergency operation that existed in the Great Lakes Region. All three classes are not only critical to the success of the operation, but are also highly sensitive and, if wrongly handled, can put it in jeopardy. The first class of information is public information; that is, informing the outside world about the situation and how it is being handled. The second, separate from the first, although clearly related to it, is statistical information required for planning and monitoring. The third is the kind of information that has to be disseminated to the target populations.

53. The disparity in the human resources invested by each agency in the public information sector virtually assures an uneven and sometimes puzzling, if not altogether contradictory, flow of information to media about the overall programme.

Recommendation: In a major emergency operation, all three agencies should appoint and post PI Officers at the regional level, whose Terms of Reference would inter alia include close co-ordination and regular sharing of information with each other. When critical programme statistics involve more than one country, the regional offices and information officers of the three agencies should consider the issuance of regular information notes, as is proposed below, at the country level.

54. Because of the sheer size and scope and the highly political nature of the Great lakes conflict emergency, there has tended to be considerable confusion and disagreement about the statistics involved in the humanitarian assistance operation. Media interest has been intense and unrelenting. The numbers, origins, and the age, gender and ethnic composition of gatherings of refugees, returnees, internally displaced and other conflict-affected persons have been sources of controversy from the outset, as have figures on amounts of food and other relief provided, the numbers of wounded and missing, and so forth.

Recommendation: The Mission thinks that, in this and similar future complex emergency operations, it is important for the three agencies to co-ordinate their public information at the headquarters, regional and country levels. Among the headquarters and regional offices, this would probably have to be done primarily by telephone, fax and email. However at the country level, the Mission recommends that the three agencies replicate an operation undertaken in Dar Es Salaam over the past year where the entire United Nations community have issued, through the aegis of the Resident Co-ordinator's office, weekly information notes containing timely programme statistics developed on a consensus basis. Each agency in Dar Es Salaam, of course, continues to undertake its own public relations, but there is a conscious, concerted effort to anticipate and allay public differences on statistics.

55. One cannot have a co-ordinated or even a consistent public information policy among the three agencies without basic agreement on essential statistics, including caseloads, population and population movements, assistance provided and assistance requirements. In the Great Lakes operation, this was to a large extent provided by IRIN, the Inter-Agency Regional Information Network of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) office in Nairobi.

Recommendation: The Mission thinks that IRIN should be a model for public information activities in future United Nations humanitarian assistance operations in regional complex emergencies. The three agencies should routinely pool resources and share information at the regional level under the aegis of the United Nations Humanitarian Co-ordinator.

56. In recent complex situations, (Vietnamese boat people, Albania, former Yugoslavia), a new and important aspect of emergency operation information support has emerged: mass information campaigns aimed at the beneficiaries of the relief efforts, whether refugees, internally displaced persons, or civilian populations of affected areas. The campaign may provide accurate information about real conditions in the place of origin to refugees or IDPs who are making decisions about movement, or it may inform about mass vaccination programmes or provide information to allay the fears of local populations affected by the existence of large numbers of refugees or IDPs. A further objective can be to improve the monitoring of the human rights situation by expanding awareness and encouraging the report of abuses. The Mission thinks that the Great Lakes emergency programme would have benefited from such a campaign, from the inception of operations in 1994.

Recommendation: The Mission recommends routine use of mass information campaigns in future complex regional emergency operations. UNHCR should take the lead in these undertakings, however all three agencies should participate. Care should be taken that there is no inconsistency between the regional public information effort (the IRIN model) directed at the international media, and the mass information campaign directed at affected populations.

Concluding Remarks

57. The way in which the international emergency assistance programme in the Great Lakes region developed and mutated over the past four years was to a large extent random, accidental, ad hoc. Civilians had long been targets of the ethnic violence in the area, but the scale and organisation of the slaughter in Rwanda in 1994 surpassed anything seen on the Continent in generations. The aftermath of anger and bitterness have fuelled the fighting that continues sporadically to this day. To some extent, it is this constant presence of low-medium level conflict across six countries, and the sudden population movements it causes, which have dictated the random patchwork of United Nations, bilateral and NGO organisational staffing, responsibilities, activities, funding, etc. The situation is constantly changing, and the system responds reflexively.

58. There have been other determinative factors, of course, including the political motivations of donors, sharp fluctuations in media coverage and public interest/funding, and the very size and complexity of the international emergency assistance system itself. Many of these same factors have been present in other recent conflict emergency operations, and they will doubtless be there in the next big one as well.

59. That said, the Mission team believes that in the Great Lakes emergency operation the disparate elements of the system, and in particular the three United Nations agencies at its core, began to relate to each other operationally in ways and to a degree not seen before. The ethos of competition was to some extent overcome by the ethos of co-operation. This report provides ample evidence of this fact, just as it details those glaring failures to co-ordinate which remain. Certainly the system's chaotic approach to personnel security in a

high-risk environment throughout the operation, must temper any celebration of new forms of joint action and co-ordination

TRIPARTITE STUDY MISSION COMPOSITION

1. UNHCR, Operations Department Officer
2. UNICEF Consultant (UNICEF retired staff member)
3. WFP Evaluation Officer
4. WFP Consultant

MISSION ITINERARY
(13 October - 05 November 1997)

Rome	13-15 October
Nairobi	16-17 October
Kampala	18-19 October
Kigali	20-22 October
Bujumbura	23-24 October
Kampala	25-28 October
Dar Es Salaam	29-30 October

Mission splits

Nairobi	31 October	Nairobi	31 October
Kigali	31 October-02 November	Kinshasa	01-02 November

Mission rejoins

Geneva	03-05 November
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KEY DOCUMENTS FOR THE TRIPARTITE GREAT LAKES MISSION

1. Chronology of the Rwanda/Burundi Regional Emergency since April 1994 (WFP/OSA)
2. Interim Study on WFP's New Capacities in Responding to the Great Lakes Crisis, August 1997
3. Rwanda/Burundi Regional Emergency, November 1996 - June 1997 (WFP/OSA)
4. The World Food Programme's input to the UN Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeal for the Great Lakes Region, January 1997
5. WFP/UNHCR Memorandum of Understanding, March 1997
6. WFP/UNHCR Goma Joint Workplan, 1995
7. WFP Commodity Tracking System Workshops, Kampala, 12-16 May 1997
8. Pipeline Outlook February/December 1997: Great Lakes Region, 18 February 1997 (WFP/OSA)
9. Final Report: Activities of the Air Movement Cell within Movcon Kisangani (by Steve Smith), 18 July 1997
10. Great Lakes Cluster Regional Logistic Meeting, Bujumbura, 14-17 July 1997: Recommendations and Conclusions
11. Mission Report - Repatriation of CDR Refugees from Tanzania (by J.P. Leroy), 14 August 1997
12. Inter-Agency Logistics Co-ordination Eastern Zaire, 1997 (by D. Katruud)
13. Operating Procedures for United Nations Joint Logistics Centres, 1997
14. David Schaad General Report on Movcon Kisangani, June 1997
15. Rail Assessment in Eastern Zaire, 1997 (by Pedro Figueiredo)
16. WFP Air Operations Entebbe in Support of the Great Lakes Region and Eastern Zaire Emergency, 1997 (by N. Sanders and S. Larrison)
17. Lessons Learned from the Movcon Operation, 1997 (by David Katruud)
18. Movcon-Airlift- Eastern Zaire Crisis TC/IT Lessons Learned (by P. Casier)
19. Mid-Year Report for the Regional Logistics Office, Kampala, 8 September 1997
20. Great Lakes Region (WFP/UNHCR Joint Food Aid Assessment Mission), October 1996
21. UNICEF Supply and Logistics Review - Great Lakes Region, 30 September - 3 October, 1997
22. Assessment of Health Care Services, Health and Nutrition Status, Dr. Arthur, Marx, CDC, 16 May 1997
23. Site Visit of Eastern Congo/Zaire: Analysis of Humanitarian and Political Issues, April - 10 May 1997
24. Mid-Term Review Meeting on the Great Lakes Region, 4 August 1997
25. Conference Calls, 2 October 1997
26. Sitreps, 5 September 1997 (UNICEF Brazaville)
27. Contribution to Interagency Meeting, 13 August 1997 (UNICEF Brazaville)
28. MOU: UNHCR and UNICEF, 14 March 1996
29. Burundi Weekly Update, 16-22 September 1997
30. Overview of Humanitarian Situation, 26 September 1997
31. DRC Sitrep, 16-22 September 1997
32. Burundi Operations Management and Process Review
33. GLR Daily Information Summary, 3 October 1997

34. DHA Report Projected Humanitarian Activities in Eastern DRC, June - Dec. 1997
35. Draft Joint USAID/EPI/UNICEF/WHO, Immunization Pre-Implementation Team (Report of a field visit to DRC 6-22 August 1997)
36. Report of a field Mission on Gender Issues in Emergencies (UNICEF), Burundi, 14-16 Aug 1997
37. Rapport de mission au Burundi, Joanne Csete, UNICEF Nutrition Section, 16 September 1997
38. Burundi Humanitarian Situation Report, 25 June - 1 July 1997
39. United Nations Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeal for the Great Lakes Emergency Mid-Term Review, United Nations, July 1997
40. United Nations Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeal for the Great Lakes Emergency, January - December 1997, Department of Humanitarian Affairs, March 1997
41. Brazzaville Flash Appeal, Department of Humanitarian Affairs, October 1997
42. Revised Terms of Reference for Lessons Learned Study on Humanitarian Coordination in the Great Lakes Region, Dept. of Humanitarian Affairs, 11 September 1997
43. Minutes of the Regional Logistics Meeting (UNHCR), Nairobi, 26-27 February 1997
44. Letter of Understanding (UNHCR/UNICEF/WFP), UN Aircraft Operation in Rwanda, August 1997
45. WFP/UNHCR Joint Work Plan, Kigoma 1997
46. Humanitarian Interventions in Response to the Great Lakes Crisis, UNICEF Dar Es Salaam, October 1996
47. Project agreement between the World Food Programme in Rwanda and the United Nations Children's Fund in Rwanda, Kigali, June 1997
48. Outline agreement between UNICEF and World Food Programme on Cooperation within the Great Lakes Region, October 1996
49. WFP/UNICEF Global Field Telecommunications MOU, 6 November 1997
50. Joint Operations Plan for Humanitarian Assistance in Burundi, Bujumbura, October 1996

UNHCR/UNICEF/WFP tripartite lessons learned exercise on operational coordination in the Great Lakes (Sept 1996 to present) - TORs

1. Background:

Almost two years have passed since the *Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda* raised significant issues of concern over coordination of humanitarian response. This multi-donor evaluation (covering up to 1995) focused principally on broader strategic coordination issues but also touched on operational coordination. With the turn of events in eastern Zaire, humanitarian assistance agencies have since operated in a worsening security environment over an expanding area of the region. The Great Lakes experience has continued to present rapidly changing challenges for all facets of coordination. With the Rwanda study as an important reference, this context presents further opportunity to learn how and why a culture of coordination as successfully evolved in some areas, and not in others, as well as how it can be cultivated more broadly.

In response to a request by the IASC at their meeting 20 June 1997, DHA has commissioned an independent study focusing on issues of strategic coordination and the related role of the humanitarian coordinator. This will be aimed at broader policy recommendations to the IASC on the function of the humanitarian coordinator.

At the same time there is need to draw lessons learned from and to strive to improve concrete aspects of operational coordination in the Great Lakes. A number of structures and mechanisms have been developed in this area which merit careful assessment for further development or future replication. The three largest operational international agencies working in the Great Lakes - WFP, UNHCR, UNICEF - propose to carry out a joint internal lessons learned exercise which will serve to document and consolidate their operational coordination efforts and mechanisms in the region.

The two exercises are to be linked as part of a coherent evaluative process through information sharing between teams.

2. Objective:

The proposed tripartite UNHCR/UNICEF/WFP lessons learned exercise will examine operational aspects of humanitarian assistance coordination in the Great Lakes region in order:

- To contribute to a shared regional inter-institutional process of self-evaluation which will prioritize and shape work to improve inter-agency coordination of humanitarian assistance appropriate to the changing context, and
- To document lessons for broader application to humanitarian assistance.

3. Key issues to be examined:

For the purposes of this evaluation, operational coordination issues are understood to encompass those practical problems and solutions encountered in linking the implementation of humanitarian assistance as carried out by various organizations. The main areas of operational coordination to be studied are grouped as follows, with some

key examples of existing coordination structures and mechanisms provided. Others may emerge in the course of the exercise. Evaluation questions listed further below would apply for each area.

- Coordination of programme implementation including targeting of vulnerable sub-groups, practical linkages in programme activities and maintaining humanitarian access. Structures and mechanisms existing include Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs), joint work plans (between UNHCR /WFP), standing agreements with NGOs, contingency planning, established emergency response capacity, and various coordination fora.
- Logistics operations, including regional level coordination (e.g. UN Joint Logistics Centre in Kampala, cross-border operations such as Ngora-Kigoma involving customs clearance procedures, links with Multi-national Forces military in Kampala), local coordination (e.g. MOVCONS), links with other logistic facilities (e.g. MCDUs), as well as specific issues such as shared air and road transportation (aircells).
- Communications systems and networks, e.g. Deep Field Mailing System as well as voice communications.
- Supply management issues, including supply pipeline for food aid and non-food items - e.g. SIMS, use of the "Julia" WFP supply contingency planning module, readiness plans and stockpiles - as well as commodity tracking systems.
- Joint evaluative activities including both formal evaluations and on-going evaluation through various coordination fora.
- Security systems guiding programme operations and protections measures for personnel.

In addition, supporting all of the above areas of operational coordination are:

- Information management: This entails information collection and analysis to guide implementation of activities, which includes security information and political analysis as well as data on affected populations and programme activities. Mechanisms include joint assessments (needs assessment at onset and re-assessment), on-going monitoring systems, informal information sharing networks and coordination fora. Information management also entails coordinating information for external relations with local authorities, international media (e.g. experience with UN spokespersons) and donors, both for accountability and fund-raising/mobilization.
- Development and application of technical standards and operational procedures, e.g. development of joint procedure guidelines, joint training, joint quality control & supervision.

4. Key evaluation/assessment questions:

As mentioned above, the following questions should guide information gathering on each of the operational coordination issues outlined:

- What were/are the priority problems in operational coordination?
- What contextual and broader institutional factors shaped these problems?
- How effective were inter-agency coordination processes or mechanisms in analysing problems and developing solutions?
- How effective were solutions proposed?
- What opportunities for cost-sharing or cost reduction were or are there (cost-effectiveness)?
- How appropriate were/are solutions for the context (political, security, urgency of the situation of the population), at the time of developing the solutions or response, currently and for other emergency contexts?
- What factors contributed to the success or failure of response to coordination problems?
- Where work is in progress or gaps remain currently, what are the priorities for action?
- For these priorities, what solutions or processes to develop solutions are recommended to improve coordination?

5. Scope:

- The focus on operational coordination will link to issues of strategic coordination as well as the role of the humanitarian coordinator as mentioned below. (See below no. 6)
- While the focus will be on the three larger operational UN organizations - WFP, UNHCR and UNICEF - this exercise will necessarily examine coordination with their operational partners, including NGOs, UN agencies, international organizations as well as government. This will cut across coordination of implementation, information management, security, logistics and supply.
- The exercise will concern itself with country level as well as regional coordination experience and issues.
- Formal and informal coordination mechanisms will be examined.

6. Links to strategic coordination as proposed for separate study by DHA:

While the focus of this exercise is on operational coordination issues, the links to issues of strategic coordination must also be considered. It is important to consider how strategic coordination influenced operational coordination and vice versa. This includes consideration of the role of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and the humanitarian coordinators, where these have influenced the formulation of operational coordination mechanisms and responses among the three agencies and their partners

The links between strategic and operational coordination are strongest around the following issues:

- Programme planning is both a product of broad programme strategy and a tool for coordinating implementation and programme operations – the Consolidated Appeal Process, while generally considered a strategic coordination tool, may have affected operational coordination problems and solutions;
- Information management guides implementation as mentioned but also feeds the development and adjustment of broad strategies.
- Targeting of vulnerable populations is guided by information from monitoring activities as well as by organizational mandate, and is articulated in programme plans.

- Humanitarian access, which is linked to security developments as well as the political positioning in humanitarian coordination, also relates to operational coordination efforts to ensure access on a basis of need.
- Security information and analysis, and coordination mechanisms are shaping both operational and strategic coordination options and solutions.

In the course of this exercise, information sharing with the team commissioned by DHA on behalf of the IASC will be most important on the above mentioned issues.

7. Methodology:

The following considerations guide choices on methodology:

- While the exercise will distill lessons learned considering their relevance to other and future humanitarian assistance contexts, priority will be give to added value to field offices in the Great Lakes, in terms of on on-going improvements to operational coordination.
- Ownership of recommendations by management and staff of the three participating organizations is a priority.
- The exercise is undertaken with full recognition of the work in progress in the field to improve operational coordination.

Based on the above, the evaluation will emphasize joint analysis by agencies, maximum participation of and dialogue among key field staff, and a facilitated process of self-evaluation.

Objectivity in self-evaluation will be instilled by the evaluation team, the members of which are all lightly removed from daily operations in the Great Lakes. Similarly the process of consultation with key informants from partner organizations will provide a neutral external perspective.

The following methodologies will be used:

- Documentary review.
- Individual key informant interviews.
- Facilitated consultations with key staff of partner organizations (NGO, national and local, other UN agencies). Consultations will be designed to elicit participation of key partners in analysis of key problems, response to problems and remaining gaps.
- Facilitated self-evaluation with selected management, operational, technical staff of the three agencies as appropriate for specific areas of operational coordination (functioning as working groups). The self-evaluation process draws information from the first four methodologies listed above and will involve identification/validation of priority problems, analysis of findings on response to problems and remaining gaps, formulation of lessons learned and development of recommendations. The process will use meetings/workshops and facilitated e-mail/telephone discussion groups as is appropriate for the different steps of the analysis, i.e. from information gathering to development of recommendations.

Field staff in involvement:

The objective of the study and the proposed self-evaluation approach necessarily imply a heavy involvement of field staff (current and past) of the Great Lakes region. For a number of reasons (logistics, cost, process) this involvement will be best achieved through the use of selected key informants in a series of working groups which cut across agencies and field stations, bringing staff together around issues or areas of operational coordination. A wider group of key informants, including staff previously working in the region, will be used for individual interviews or soliciting comments on recommendations.

Broader participation:

Participation of partners will be introduced in information gathering and analysis facilitated by the evaluation team which will then be fed into the self-evaluation by the three agencies. Transparency and promotion of dialogue will be the responsibility of country offices through, for example, dissemination of recommendations. The evaluation team, however, will promote these through its guidance in formulation of follow-up structures and steps.

Beneficiaries consultation will not be included due to the particular focus of the evaluation - on internal coordination mechanism, problems and solutions - and the breadth (geographically and in terms of technical issues) of the lessons learned exercise. In the context of this exercise, beneficiary consultation is rather a criteria for evaluating the effectiveness and appropriateness of some coordination mechanisms, problems and solutions examined. This is primarily of concern in the area of programme implementation, particularly in relation to management of information on affected populations and programme activities.

8. Evaluation team:

The evaluation team will lead the lessons learned exercise. The team will comprise three members. A mix of staff persons and/or consultants will be selected with heavy emphasis on using their combined knowledge of the three organizations to foster discussion, ownership and follow through on recommendations.

In order to successfully support a self-evaluation process, the final composition of the team will include expertise related to humanitarian assistance operations in complex emergencies in the following areas: programme planning and coordination, logistics operations, supply pipeline management, communications systems and networks, security, information for programme management and external relations. All team members should be fluent in French and have knowledge of the Great Lakes region.

9. Products:

The product of the review will be a working document focusing on practical recommendations and proposing a work plan for implementation.

This will include:

1. A synthesis and analysis of findings on positive experiences in operational coordination.
2. A distillation of clear recommendations on their potential replication in other contexts.

3. Identification of gaps or unsolved problems.
4. Recommended priorities for action and processes for improving operational coordination.
5. Input to a work plan to be agreed upon by the three agencies with a defined schedule for achieving results and clear assignment of responsibilities.

In addition, a summary of the exercise will be prepared by the evaluation team for dissemination to the three agencies Executive Boards, members of the IASC, donors and NGOs.

10. Follow-up:

Follow-up will be ensured both through mechanisms in the Great Lakes region and through support from the headquarters of the respective agencies. Mechanisms in the region will be proposed as appropriate during the lessons learned exercise. A focal point for execution of the lessons learned exercise and for coordination of follow-up will be named by each agency.

An additional appendix on Information sources (key informants and documents) is being prepared.

Appendix A: Work plan

The timing of the study focusing on operational aspects of coordination is based on the need to capture structures and systems which were put in place at the height of the crisis, with access to the greatest number of key informants on site to allow dialogue among them as well as with the study team.

Preparatory phase prior to full-time assignment of team (dates agreed WFP/UNHCR/UNICEF):

18 Aug. Draft 1 of TORs.
1 Sept. Draft 2 of TORs with input from field
21 Sept. TORs finalized.
10 Oct. Documentation prepared:
Documentary sources of information collected for review by teams.
Initial draft of time line for analysis of Great Lakes Sept. 1996-present.
Draft work plan elaborated.
Timing and mechanisms for coordination with DHA team finalized
Evaluation team hired.

Preparatory phase by evaluation team:

Week 1 (8-13 Oct.)

- 2-3 day work at HQ of UNHCR, WFP and UNICEF complete (team splits)
- Draft interview guide developed and shared with field offices
- Revised work plan shared with field offices
- Majority of documentary review completed
- Initial consultation with DHA team

Field phase (rough outline)

Week 2-3 (14 Oct - 7 Nov):

- Key informant interviews conducted
- Consultations with NGOs
- Documentary review continues
- Work groups for self-assessment complete phases of problem identification/validation and analysis of findings, identification of remaining gaps (produced as working document)
- Work groups for self-assessment complete identification of lessons learned and recommendations
- Work plans and follow-up mechanisms developed and established in field
- Working document compiled.

Week 6 (7-14 Nov):

- Interviews of HQ personnel
- Work plans and follow-up mechanisms established in HQ/Regional offices
- Summary document produced.