

3.2. What makes Emergencies different? Inter-relations of Development, Environment and Disasters

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1. Introduction

This section of the introduction provides a framework of questions that should be addressed so that emergencies interventions that take account of environmental problems can work properly. Some of the issues show how success depends in part on the self-awareness of the institutions involved, and their willingness to recognise the power systems in which they operate and the limits these put on policies. The first part examines the relationship between institutional behaviour and power, and suggests that policies are largely determined by the potential for action rather than what is needed.

Secondly, it examines the implications of this for those who want to intervene in emergencies to make their involvement more protective of the environment. This includes being aware of the fact that the environmental problems identified are themselves largely the concern of outsiders in most relief situations, and are therefore in danger of becoming a new area of dispute between providers of assistance and the recipients.

Lastly, it suggests a number of policies that might arise if greater attention is given to the role of power and institutional behaviour: in other words, what would environmentally-sensitive policies look like if they could be devised with fewer political and diplomatic constraints?

Initially it is worth asking why there is now a growing interest by various international institutions to incorporate environmental concern into emergencies. Is there a danger that the label environment is simply being added to the list of concerns because it is fashionable or driven by interests other than those that concern people as the priority? In whose interests is it to add environment to the menu?

Most environmental problems are caused by two types of conflicts of interest. The first arise because humans make demands on ecosystems that are greater than those made by any other species, and have the inherent ability to damage environments and other species permanently. This capacity for human destructiveness has ancient origins, and exists in all regions of the world and in all periods of history. It could be labelled the human species impact (HSI) set of problems. Today, if those who are able to spend aid budgets wanted to reduce HSI, how significant are refugee emergencies in comparison with other source of such difficulties?

The second type of environment problems arise because of conflicts between different groups of people over their access to life support and production resources (especially arable land, forests, water, rangeland and fisheries). These can be termed competitive group impacts (CGI). The most severe of these conflicts arise when one group (typically from a so-called advanced economy) invades the territory of another which has different resource needs that are disrupted by the new arrivals (Cannon 1994). In effect, what is normally a much more sustainable use of the environ-

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ment is erased or severely distorted by the new users, who are able to commandeer resources by virtue of their power. The displaced peoples may themselves be victims of expulsions in conflicts over resources, and may then generate new problems in the areas they are forced to settle².

Examples of such events include those removed for dam construction or other development projects, including resettlement schemes for agriculture. Competing groups often generate particularly severe and/or sudden problems because the change in use of environmental resources is abrupt, and often involves large numbers of people or a significant shift in the technology of resource extraction.

In cases of refugee emergencies, the external agencies that are attempting to provide assistance often become embroiled in imposing a CGI problem on the host population. So the apparently simple act of incorporating environmental concerns into the policies for refugee emergencies is likely to create new difficulties for the agencies involved. Can they add environment to the list without it being part of institutional self-justification (i.e. following fashion), and avoid blaming refugees. Is it possible to incorporate environmental concerns without drawing attention to the group conflicts and heightening the tensions between them? What are the policy implications when it is perhaps the host people who are losing as much or more than the refugees?

2. Institutions and Disaster Emergencies

First, this study will look at how external interventions in emergencies are embedded in particular power relations. In addition, it will look at how the intervening institutions are forced to (or willingly accept) that there are certain political or diplomatic constraints on their activities.

To begin and illustrate my theme, let us consider a rather awkward question. Why do disasters (whether natural, technological, or complex combined emergencies) receive so much attention, given that in general 'normal' everyday life for many people in much of the world is much more 'risky'? The first reason is obvious, well recognised and not easy to change: the media give disasters and emergencies priority, so that the general public and political leaders are directed to think in terms of the exceptional rather than the normal. This is partly excused by what is often called human nature. The media are supposedly responding to humanitarian interest and compassion, and a widespread human fascination with danger.

But there is a further explanation that is not so widely accepted. Disasters receive disproportionate attention because of the behaviour of institutions and the power systems of which they are part. The way in which power systems operate have an in-built tendency to focus on the exceptional: it is convenient for political elites to distract attention from the normal, and scientific establishments may often be in danger of tailoring their research to benefit from that set of priorities (Blaikie et al. 1994).

This can be illustrated with an analogy: road safety issues in the West as compared with aircraft safety. Many more people use roads (the normal) and die in road accidents than in aircraft crashes (the exceptional). Yet at least until the 1980s far more effort went into aircraft safety issues. This is partly because crashes make headlines, forcing political systems and institutions to respond. But it is also because aircraft safety is much more susceptible to technical fixes (which are deemed possible) and are not basically a challenge to political systems (which are resistant). Dealing with road accidents requires much more social (behavioural) change, and shifts in politics which may be difficult.

² Black and Sessay (c.1995) report a more optimistic outcome in the Senegal River valley, west Africa, mainly because the ethnic affinity of people expelled from Mauntania and the valley inhabitants in Senegal enabled the refugees to have access to land and water and to engage in economic activities.

There is also a lack of institutions (because of power systems) with an inherent interest in improving road safety. The exception is of course the motor vehicle industry, which in the 1980s introduced car safety as a selling-point. But even this demonstrates the argument about institutional interests, since not all aspects of improved car safety improves the chances of those not in the cars, and indeed some argue that making vehicles safer merely makes drivers behave more aggressively and dangerously (Adams 1995). Moreover, making cars safer is a technical fix aimed at a single mode of private transport, outside the context of the entire system. It ignores the even greater safety benefits that could be gained from increased public transport or other policy initiatives.

Let us transfer these arguments to development issues and disasters. In comparison with the impact of everyday living and dying, disasters are a relatively minor cause of human suffering. In April 1995 the World Health Organisation report 'Bridging the Gap' put the number of annual deaths of children under 5 years as 12.2 million a year, mostly from easily-preventable or treatable illnesses (The Guardian, 2 May 1995). This is many times more than mortality from emergencies and disasters in most decades. It is useful to consider the proposition that in development work, as a general rule professional groups and their institutions tend to define problems in terms of their own existence and its perpetuation.

This type of problem has been analysed by Michael Thompson in relation to the Food and Agricultural Organisation's (FAO) forestry policies (Chapman and Thompson, 1995 pp.30-31). This analysis is not politically biased, and may apply to large NGOs and left-wing political groups as much as any other: though such groups may have less power, they run the risk of devising policies that enable them to continue as institutions. NGOs or political parties rarely dissolve themselves or merge with other organisations with whom they share similar goals. NGO and official aid agencies are in danger of defining problems in terms of what they consider themselves capable of doing, and of perpetuating their own existence by defining problems in terms of their own agenda³.

This is of course a widespread phenomenon that extends beyond institutions alone. Academics often argue that all problems require more research. Scientists seek funding for expensive projects on the basis that they will benefit humanity. This is argued even when the resulting technological advances are often not related to real needs, and may even worsen conditions for significant numbers of people. Civil engineers will present the case for technical fixes to complex problems, such as Bangladesh floods, even when many more people die in cyclonic storms than in riverine floods (Blaikie et al 1994, ch.6). Where political and social change is more relevant for a real solution, it is given a lower priority because it is more difficult or challenges existing power systems.

Thus in short, there is a considerable danger that institutions and the power systems in which they are embedded, operate on the basis of fulfilling their own roles rather than identifying what is really required: what is done is what is possible, not what is needed. Though the situation is now much improved, a classic illustration of this is how European Community and United States government food aid was designed to solve domestic farm surpluses as much as the nutritional needs of recipients.

If we use this type of analysis, we can also see why there is more emphasis on people displaced by disasters and emergencies, although in fact there are an estimated 50 million 'normal' refugees around the world, and countless tens of millions of other 'economic migrants' forced by poverty or lack of access to livelihood resources to move to cities or other regions of their own countries. The media focus and institutional justification for dealing with disasters is that they appear more

³ Seaman (1990; p.8) argues that compared with the total costs of an emergency the value of external aid is usually a very small fraction, and this suggests that agencies have an enormous impact on what is allowed to be done in crises compared with the resources they actually provide

significant than 'normal' everyday life, despite the fact that it is possible that there are as many people displaced by development projects as there are by disasters and wars (McCully 1995). This number would be multiplied many times over if we included people who are in effect forcibly-displaced and seriously-deprived people living in their own country (in conditions little better than many formally-designated as refugees), such as most black people in South Africa, the Palestinians, indigenous Australians, and many North American Indians.

3. The Implications of Incorporating Environment in Emergencies

We need a legitimate basis for dealing with emergencies in general, and perhaps even more so for dealing with environmental issues within that context. This is especially because a priori it would seem to be extremely difficult to add environment as a further layer of concern in situations in which by definition it is extremely difficult to operate effectively.

Why is it necessary to specifically recognise the environment as a category to signify problems when dealing with disaster emergencies? The opportunity cost in terms of the foregone investment in other environmental problems may be very high in emergencies, where all operations are difficult and often inadequate. In other words, would such money be better spent elsewhere on environmental issues? Is it possible to treat environmental issues within the framework of the conventional aid effort in emergencies, and without significantly adding to costs, or shifting the burden on the environment elsewhere?

Are environmental problems in emergencies deserving of a higher priority for any reason, perhaps because they would otherwise increase mortality, morbidity and reduce life-prospects of the displaced people (and/or the host population)? It seems important at the outset of new attempts to be sensitive to environmental problems of refugee emergencies to be as clear as possible about what can and cannot be done, and whether it is worthwhile to try to do it, without simply adding a fashionable new layer.

If we return to development initiatives themselves, as well as generating their own refugees, many are well-known as causes of environmental disasters. Dam projects, transmigration schemes in Indonesia, land colonisation schemes in many countries, irrigation projects across the world, all are associated with environmental destruction on scales that appear on the face of it to be far worse than that connected with refugees and emergencies. In other words, investment in dealing with environmental problems associated with displaced peoples may be much more effective if spent on the more predictable and long-standing problems associated with deliberate population movements. Why concentrate on emergencies?

3.1. Time-scales and inclusion/exclusion from consideration

One of the implications of the institutional behaviour and power systems involved in relief efforts is that some events are included and others excluded from consideration. This operates both in terms of which groups of people are or are not allowed to be included, and the time period that is considered valid. What relevance does the assumed time-scale of the emergency have on the potential for implementation? For how long is the term emergency phase valid? It is no longer normally applied to many groups, despite their original status as emergency refugees.

For instance, although their conditions are in many cases no better after fifty or a hundred years than many current refugees, Palestinians and many Mozambicans, let alone North American Indians or Australian Aborigines are 'excluded' from use of the term emergency phase. Why should it be used only in relation to the immediate expulsion and its aftermath? To what extent is

it media-driven or related to immediate political agendas of those who determine priorities regionally and internationally? What effects would this have on resolution of the emergency over the longer term, and the place of environmental concerns in that process? Should the attention be given only or primarily to refugees in camps, or more generally including those absorbed into existing settlements, and also to the host population?

What about the motivation of the displaced people to deal with environmental problems? Is there any relationship between the length of time that people are displaced and their degree of concern to preserve the environment? Common sense suggests that immediate needs on arrival are likely to exclude the environment from the immediate concern, and to highlight the validity of external agencies in providing policies and assistance.

Should it be assumed that once the displacement becomes 'normal' or long-term, and any hope of return has diminished, then the refugees might consider an environmental agenda. But by then they may expect environmental concerns to be organised by the donors. There is also the problem of the host population, and its own reaction to the changed access to production and other resources that results from the refugee influx. The environmental damage resulting from the hosts having to use different or fewer resources could be more severe than the activities of the displaced peoples, and yet there may be no institutional responsibility to deal with this by national or international agencies.

3.2. Whose environment should we be concerned about and why?

What type and scale of environmental problems are we concerned with and why? Is it local production and life support resources? De-vegetation, biodiversity and species extinction (for instance some refugees and disrupted host populations in Africa have been implicated in wildlife poaching)? Local ecosystems and sustainability, or the global environment and carbon cycle? These different types of problem are of varying levels of significance depending on who defines them, ranging from groups and institutions at different levels from local (including various conflicting groups) to international. Each may also have very different perceptions of the causes of damage and of what should be done about it. Are the refugees victims, a part of the problem (e.g. de-vegetation and species extinction and poaching as a survival strategy), or part of the solution? In other words, whose definition of what constitutes an environmental problems is to be given validity, and what impact will this have on policy-making?

How can we assess whether the environmental impact of the ousted people is worse than that in their place of origin? Do the ecosystems of the areas people move from have the opportunity to recover during their evacuation? From what perspective should this be judged: that of the local ecosystem, global environment, the ousted peoples' or host's livelihoods, that of different classes, ethnic groups, men or women? How will the areas vacated by ousted people be used: will new users appropriate their land/resources and make new, worse, or better environmental impacts?

Who has control over environmental resources in the refugees' destination? In what ways does this pre-existing pattern of asset-control affect the access of the refugees and therefore how they may be forced to degrade other resources? What conflicts arise between the needs of displaced people (often farmers and pastoralists) and the livelihoods of existing inhabitants (i.e. what new forms of contestation and rivalry can arise)? How do the ousted people relate to the existing power systems in the destination, and who can adjudicate on their behalf? What relevance do the perceptions of different groups on the time-scale involved have on their behaviour to each other and their attitude to the environment?

What are the economic and social characteristics of the ousted people, and how do their internal differences affect their use of environmental resources in exile? What bundle of assets do they bring with them (in terms of money, equipment, expertise, kinship links and entitlements, contacts and networks, shared ethnicity)? How effective is this bundle compared with their homeland? Do they gain access to resources in their new location in different ways, with some having better opportunities than others? How are land and water rights allocated? How are fuel and fodder resources allocated? What attitudes to crops, plants, animals, wildlife change in response to the displacement? How do other characteristics of the refugees affect these attitudes (e.g. age, gender, disability and morbidity)? How do different economic and social characteristics affect the planning horizon of the displaced people? What are their concepts of development and progress (sustainability) in the context of this interaction of their characteristics and the perceived time-scale of exile? What concepts of progress/development on their behalf are held by NGOs and aid agencies that are involved, and how different are these from the people themselves?

4. Policy Potential and Political Realities

What type of pro-environment interventions can be made when the encircling society and/or its ruling group are hostile (e.g. Sudan/Khartoum, Palestine/Israel, Zaire/Rwanda, Ethiopia under Mengistu, Somalia, South Africa), unsupportive (e.g. Malawi) or themselves poor (e.g. Angola, Tanzania as well as many others already mentioned)?

How is it possible to alter the priorities of either the host or the ousted people to give environment some significance? Why should they? How will they respond if it is outside agencies who are asking them to reset the agenda? How can existing needs and complaints of the ousted people be channelled effectively into pro-environment behaviour? How can those of the host be so channelled?

Displaced people are not socially-homogenised in their place of origin, and being expelled does not eradicate economic and social differences. Their existing power systems are likely to be maintained to a large extent while refugees, though they may be transformed and modified to some extent. Whose ideas of environmental use and preferences should be given validity? Emergencies are not social levellers despite the media appearance of similar conditions being endured by all.

Probably the most difficult set of issues are those affecting the host population, since in many cases it is they whose ability to cope with the influx is least supported by either national or international agencies. Host peoples often lose access to their own environmental resources, and are less likely to receive any compensation. Some foreign NGOs are forbidden by their own charitable objectives to assist them, being bound to rules of aid for victims of the emergency. And yet, in some cases the easiest way to help the refugees would be through policies that assist the hosts in their ability to co-ordinate with the victims of the emergency, or to reduce the hostility of local peoples to the new arrivals.

This illustrates the problems raised in the earlier analysis of how policies are associated with what is possible rather than what is needed. Other key examples also relate to the host communities. For example, it is largely impossible under current international political and diplomatic circumstances for agencies or foreign governments to attempt to predict emergencies that might lead to mass displacements of people. This might be perceived as interference in domestic affairs, or criticism of sovereign states, or taking sides in disputes. It is therefore extremely difficult to prepare for emergencies even when to many people their likelihood seems obvious (e.g. Burundi during and after the Rwanda crisis). It is consequently almost impossible to take into account the environmental needs inherent in any given population movement.

There is also an assumption under current international arrangements that refugee emergencies will only be eligible for multilateral agency assistance if they are cross-border. Furthermore, it is assumed that they will involve the neighbouring countries in providing a haven and sites of camps only temporarily. Crucial in this is the acceptance that land will not be allocated for farming or grazing, and that other resources will not be made available for long-term use.

This is an understandable and sensitive approach designed to reassure the host government and the local population that their disturbance is temporary. Yet it may lead the refugees to some forms of environmental abuse that are detrimental to their hosts and might be averted if the political circumstances were less rigid. It also makes it difficult to develop policies that incorporate the needs of both the host and refugee groups, or to encourage any symbiosis and positive relationships between them.

4.1. Policy objectives for external agencies

What should the policy objectives be if there were no existing power systems and political constraints? One of the most obvious and significant is to assist in removing or reducing the threat that has caused expulsion, though this is often an area that international agencies find difficult to deal with precisely because of diplomatic and political restrictions. The agencies tend to limit their intervention to providing a safe and healthy environment for the duration of the expulsion. This is often not fulfilled because institutional behaviour and power restricts action to what is possible rather than what is needed.

This is illustrated by the debate and dispute in February 1996 concerning the surveys of the UN intervention in Rwanda⁴. Supplies necessary for the welfare of refugees should also take account of the need to minimise the animosity of the host people. This should at least include a commitment to energy supplies in addition to food and water, so that one major environmental impact on local bio-mass can be reduced. Where repatriation is likely to be impossible or to take a long time, there should be negotiation with existing users for access to land, water and other environmental resources to minimise conflict with host communities. In fact it is likely that all refugee initiatives should include a fully integrated approach involving the host peoples, to search for positive interactions between the two groups.

Major immediate objectives then should be to provide assets for possible (realisable) livelihoods to help prevent refugees having to revert to environmentally damaging activities. Most of these goals are very different from those normally incorporated in refugee emergencies. Usually the people are treated as victims requiring outside aid, incapable of economic activities or recovery, and lacking any rights to resources because of their supposed temporary status.

Some of these needs would include exploring the possibility of land for cultivation, assistance to those whose ability to farm is limited (perhaps because of missing or sick family members), necessary farm tools and key inputs, ploughing services and other land preparation if necessary (organised to avoid damaging practices), access to water for cultivation and animals, veterinary services, marketing arrangements for animals and other produce.

The emergency programme should address the needs and aspirations of the host people, and integrate them as necessary into the emergency management. Mobilising their indigenous know-

⁴ Seaman (1990) provides an interesting contrast with the commonplace assumptions about the benefits of emergency relief, and argues that much is ineffective. De Waal (1989) found considerable evidence that mortality was greater in emergency camps (from disease) than might have been expected if the same people had not fled famine in Darfur in search of relief.

ledge is likely to be valuable, and respecting it will increase their self-worth. Workshops and other semiformal structures for the sharing of local knowledge (of plants, soils, seeds, weather, etc.) between hosts and displaced people could be arranged.

Evaluation of the long and medium term impacts of displacement is vital, and the development of environmental suitability programmes (ESPs?) when it has to be assumed the displacement is not temporary. In fact the assumption perhaps should be that the displacement is at least medium-term, and political expectations and policies created on that basis so that antagonisms are reduced through proper expectations and planning.

Special attention needs to be given to the refugee impacts on bio-mass, through the rapid assessment of fuel needs and by making adequate food aid provision where appropriate (e.g. palatable and acceptable foodstuffs that minimise energy needs in their preparation). Providing fencing may protect bio-mass, but need to take account of cultural needs (e.g. wire-link may protect animals but may not fulfil cultural needs such as privacy or *purdah*)

There will need to be assessment and provision of house construction material that are an adequate substitute for wood if necessary. Evaluation of water table and other water resources, and assessment of impact of any increased withdrawal should take account of impacts on local users as well as refugees. There needs to be rapid evaluation of replanting and seed requirements, including provision for crops that provide fodder, thatch, and fuel. Where necessary there may need to be compensation and substitution of resources for the host people.

5. Conclusion

In general, organisations that are dedicated to dealing with humanitarian assistance have a tendency to consider problems as defined by the role expected of them and which they are capable - within given political constraints - of delivering. They are constrained both from seeing a broader picture in which emergencies might be a relatively much less significant, because it is often the case that they are embedded in the power systems that at least partially generate the problems of the normal and the everyday.

This is especially true for those organisations that are more constrained by governments' political frameworks. They are likely to be unwilling or unable to accept that many problems are caused at least in part by the governments or international organisations of which they are part (as donors) or with which they have to maintain relations (as recipients). In short, as with development projects in general, emergency interventions are in danger of being institutionally-determined and opportunity-driven or capability-driven, not needs-driven.

There is no necessary relationship between what is needed and what is possible or what is actually done. What is possible may not be needed. What is needed may not be done. What is done is usually what it is considered can be done, and often this is also what will retain rather than challenge the political relationships that determine power systems within which that institution has to operate.

This rather pessimistic analysis of what can be perceived as a rational but rather distorted approach to the world is not fixed and irrevocable. In the last fifteen years we have seen a fundamental shift away from emergency assistance towards an integration of aid with development. NGOs are increasingly trusted with the delivery of welfare and even other governmental functions. While this entails its own dangers, it also suggests that alternative power structures can be developed that responds more to needs on the ground and have less connection with local elites.

We are also seeing signs that major international agencies like the Red Cross are willing to accept that abuses of power and exploitation - the 'normal' grind of everyday life - is the real cause of much suffering, and that emergencies should be seen in this perspective⁵.

In the 1990s we have also seen the first developments of aid interventions that go against the premise of state sovereignty, and which seek multilateral solutions to civil conflicts. These have often been inadequate or have gone badly wrong, as with the many problems in Somalia, Rwanda, former Yugoslavia. And there is a notable lack of interventions in other places, or single-country interventions that have betrayed both the people and the motives of the interventionist power (e.g. Panama, Haiti).

At present the international system for dealing with emergency assistance is crude and reveals all the signs of its origins in both the Cold War and the system of national sovereignty. Attempts to provide different types of interventions are not working well both because there is little experience of this new approach. But the problems persist because the power systems of the world still basically uphold the benefits of minorities in most countries, who serve in alliance with an international global elite which directs and commands global resources in its own interests.

In this context international relief is bound to be inadequate and partial. It is also likely to deal with environmental problems, including those linked to emergencies, in ways that are inadequate and incomplete. There is also the danger that the environmental component is merely added to the list of things to be done to fulfil current fashions or donor conditions, and that it is not taken seriously or is done against the local people rather than with them and for them. Adding environment to a list in this way also involves the danger of depoliticising the causes of the problems or shifting the blame for them to the victims themselves. If all these dangers can be highlighted at the beginning of this debate then they can better be avoided, and there is the potential - as this book demonstrates - for a considerable improvement in the future.

⁵ See for example the IFRC/RCS (1994) report and its comments on Brazil and some other countries

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3.3. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Environmental Issues: UNHCR's Experience and Response

1. Refugee Related Environmental Problems

Like any other mass population movement, the influx and subsequent settlement of refugees bring forth environmental consequences. The recent Burundi/ Rwanda emergency and the incidence of Afghan, Mozambican, Cambodian and Ethiopian refugees in the past involved a caseload of millions. Prolonged presence of such populations in neighbouring countries tends to result in various forms of environmental problems, which usually accompany significant changes in the social and economic systems of the local communities.

The nature and the magnitude of environmental problems associated with refugees have intensified in recent years. As environmental factors, a couple of points can be singled out:

- (i) environmental concerns have become increasingly serious in both quality and extent, and some issues such as declining biodiversity and deforestation are now of global concern, and
- (ii) as a result, environmental awareness has considerably increased in developing countries, where most of the refugee related environmental problems have taken place.

However refugee related factors now seem decisive in aggravating environmental problems around many refugee camps. First, refugee populations have dramatically increased in the 1990s. In many new emergencies, refugee population concentrations are even considerably larger than the local population of the immediately surrounding area. Second, refugee populations are frequently located in environmentally sensitive areas, including in the vicinity of national parks and other protected sites. Third, refugees are tending to stay in countries of asylum for longer periods, which of course increases environmental impacts around the refugee camps.

Refugee related environmental problems are different from one place to another, mainly because environmental conditions, including carrying capacity of an area, are specific to the locality. Environmental problems commonly observed in refugee affected areas are deforestation, soil erosion and water depletion/contamination. These problems can be seen as the degradation of renewable natural resources around the refugee sites. Each of these problems is caused by a number of different refugee activities. For example, deforestation results from tree-felling for fuel, heating, lighting and construction materials as well as from delays or failures in shortage of remedial reforestation efforts.

These physical impacts create socio-economic impacts on refugees and on local communities. The effects of environmental degradation harm refugee women and children disproportionately, particularly those effects related to deforestation caused by fuel-wood gathering. Women must spend longer and longer hours seeking and carrying wood, entailing increased exposure to assault; children are forced to miss school; as fuel supplies become harder to obtain, cooking time may be shortened and water not boiled, leading to increased incidence of disease; refugee families may be forced to sell part of their food rations to obtain the fuel needed to cook the remainder resulting in under-nutrition. Basically the same social impacts may be imposed upon host populations, particularly the poorest, who are most dependent on the surrounding environment for a livelihood and for fuel. Competition with the refugees for scarce resources such as fuel-wood, fodder and water could result in conflicts and violence, as the environment is degraded.

The local poor may feel economic impacts most directly, as the refugees' demands force up prices for food and fuel. However much larger and longer economic hardship is caused by deforestation, denudation of vegetation and water resource depletion, which result in loss of pasture and agricultural land. In serious cases local infrastructure including dams and roads could be damaged, which, together with impacts on pasture and agriculture, could totally disrupt the past pattern of economic activities of the area. The huge economic cost of such destruction often goes unrecorded. Even when the needs of nationals are correctly presented, the international community's generosity towards refugees often does not extend to their severely affected hosts.

The recent Rwanda emergency has added a new dimension to the refugee related environmental problems. The eastern Zaire region of North and South Kivu hosts approximately one million Rwandan refugees. The turmoil and acute health problems at the initial emergency phase were well documented by the media in the summer of 1994. With their prolonged stay in the region, the damage caused by their heavy pressure on the region's natural resources is prevailing over corrective action.

The Kivu region of Zaire is characterised by high volcanic mountains and several lakes, being located in a branch of the Rift Valley. The mountain tropical climate and the varied geographical settings have provided unique flora and fauna to the region, known worldwide. Two World Heritage Sites exist in the region, namely Virunga National Park and Kafuzi Biega National Park. Given the scarcity of under-utilised land and in accordance with the Government's policy, refugee camps were set up along the Rwandan border area, with several camps adjacent to these national parks.

In view of the emergent situations, this choice was unavoidable, as such a mass population can hardly be moved to areas remote from the initial points of influx, and as the paramount concern was to save lives in face of the highest mortality rates ever recorded in such an emergency. The settling of refugees in well serviced sites near an airport, towns, water resource and roads was of overriding importance. This siting has, however, posed an increasingly severe environmental problem: notably damage to the Virunga National Park. Environmental problems caused by the refugees have for the first time assumed a global importance, because of the threat to the unique biodiversity supported by the Virunga National Park.

There are some basic explanations for characteristics of environmental problems associated with refugees. The first is that states have an obligation to admit asylum seekers, and practical and political - not environmental - considerations will often determine where refugees are settled. Thus some environmental impacts are unavoidable in particular when refugee influx is massive. The second is that the highest priority in a refugee emergency must be to save lives. All other longer-term considerations, including conservation of the environment, are subordinated to that vital task in the early days of an influx. The third point relates to uncertainty. Uncertainty about the number of refugees who will occupy a site, and about the duration of their stay impedes proactive planning, which is the key to the prevention-oriented environmental interventions. The last point is motivation. Refugees have little if any motivation to conserve the surrounding environment, because the land around them do not belong to them. Refugees tend to see their stay in the area only temporally. Abstract notions of global or even local environmental stewardship are not relevant to refugees, who are often still traumatised by their experience.

2. UNHCR's Response

The social and environmental problems prevailing in the refugee receiving areas of the host countries have prompted new policy and programme formulation by UNHCR. As early as 1984, UNHCR's governing body adopted "*Principles of Action for Developing Countries*"; addressing UNHCR's role in refugee related development type projects. Under these principles, "projects aimed at repairing or improving a host country's economic and social infrastructure to help cope

with the presence of refugees " were covered, to give effect to soil conservation , watershed protection and reforestation activities in the refugee affected areas. A notable project was that launched in Pakistan with the World Bank (IGPRA I, II, III: 1984-1994) , coupling these activities with income generation schemes for refugees and the local community.

Although less significant in scale, projects similar to IGPRA have been introduced in other refugee-hosting countries since then. Recent examples are found in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Iran, Kenya, Malawi, Mexico, Nepal, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zimbabwe with increasing orientation to environmental protection and rehabilitation. Some reforestation projects were carried out with indigenous tree species; wherever possible they involved refugees themselves and locals. Most of the other projects included preventive measures as well, such as introduction of fuel efficient stoves, provision of fuel, for example kerosene or crop residues, and environmental education initiatives. The High Commissioner's speech at UNCED (1992, Brazil) drew attention to the problems and to these efforts.

Following UNCED, UNHCR's specific policy on environmental matters was a subject of discussion by its governing body. In July 1994, UNHCR adopted the "*Interim Guidelines for Environment-Sensitive Management of Refugee Programmes*" , which set the stage for further policy development. The fundamental principle enunciated in the Interim Guidelines was the integration of an environmental perspective into UNHCR programme planning and implementation. The Interim Guidelines introduced the following four measures to strengthen UNHCR's response to environmental concerns. UNHCR took measures to:

1. institute environmental reporting, surveys, monitoring and studies;
2. define environmental criteria for selection and planning of a refugee site;
3. promote environment oriented projects and programming; and
4. define and mobilise the technical and operational support required from Headquarters.

These Guidelines were qualified as interim because more reflection and discussion, based on further studies and experience, was thought to be necessary before elaborating definitive guidelines. UNHCR's environmental policy is still consolidating. With the prevailing situations in Zaire and elsewhere, it is clear that most refugee relief operations in developing countries need a significant environmental component. However, the role of UNHCR in these activities with a humanitarian not development mandate, the way to promote active participation of development assistance agencies, means of cooperation with host governments, other UN agencies, bilateral aid programmes and relevant NGOs, are only some of the issues to be addressed before formalising the comprehensive environmental strategy to which UNHCR is committed.

PROGRESS REPORT ON THE GUIDELINES ON REFUGEES AND THE ENVIRONMENT

I. Introduction

1. The Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, at its forty-fifth session in October 1994 adopted a conclusion on refugees and the environment, with the aim of mitigating the environmental impact of the presence of refugees. Therefore, in December 1994, the Senior Management Committee decided to establish an internal Working Group on the Environment. The final report of the Working Group (July 1995) reviewed UNHCR's policy on the environment and proposed a number of refinements to it. The resulting, more focused policy was developed on the basis of UNHCR's past experience in environmental matters and an assessment of the effectiveness of the Interim Guidelines for Environment-Sensitive management of Refugee Programmes (July 1994). The Working Group Report also elaborated a series of practical steps to assist UNHCR to integrate environmental concerns into day-to-day programmes. The Report of the Working Group received the broad endorsement of UNHCR's Senior Management Committee.
2. This paper sets out UNHCR's reformulated policy and desired operational outcomes concerning environmental matters associated with refugee situations. It takes as its point of departure the Final Report of the Working Group on the Environment.

II. The Policy

2.1 General

3. This policy applies to environmental issues associated with the presence of refugees. Among environmental problems associated with refugee situations, the major ones are: deforestation, soil erosion and depletion and degradation of water, as well as the socio-economic impacts of such problems on refugees and local communities. It is hoped that the reformulated policy and operational outcomes set out below, to be introduced in a step-by-step manner over the coming three to four years, will enable UNHCR to make a focused, meaningful contribution to resolving these refugee-related environmental problems.

2.2 Basic Environmental Principles

4. The basic environmental principles listed below are in accord with the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and the spirit of Agenda 21, adopted at the Earth Summit at Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

2.2.1. Integration

5. Environmental concerns need to be reflected in major activities. Separation of environmental activities from mainstream operations tends to be ineffective. Real integration of environmental concerns into the planning and implementation of UNHCR's programmes is to be pursued.

2.2.2. Prevention

6. Prevention should be the norm, rather than cure, because the natural environment possesses intrinsic value which cannot be recreated or replaced by humanity.

2.2.3. Cost-effectiveness

7. An approach based on cost-effectiveness is essential to achieve the most productive mix of actions. This means total costs, including environmental costs for all actors concerned, should be minimised. Judicious implementation of preventive environmental measures can actually substantially reduce the total real cost of refugee operations.

2.2.4. Participation

8. To make environmental measures sustainable, participation of all concerned is essential. Thus refugees and local populations must be fully involved, together with implementing agencies on the ground, in setting environmental objectives, planning and implementing activities. Particular attention must be given to the poor and vulnerable including women and children, who suffer disproportionately from refugee-induced environmental problems.

2.3. Organisational Principles

2.3.1. Integration

9. All environment-related action required during the emergency and care-and maintenance phases should be an integrated part of the response of UNHCR and budgeted accordingly under Special or General Programmes as applicable. This is essential to ensure consistent environmental damage-prevention and limitation in the field. Other environmental requirements, such as rehabilitation, would receive limited UNHCR funding, under Special Programmes, and be covered by special consolidated appeals, or by other bi- or multilateral development funding sources.

2.3.2. Role of actors concerned

10. The role of actors in addressing environmental concerns specific to refugee situations should be defined according to their relationship to environmental problems linked to refugees, and to the resources they may contribute to developing solutions to those problems. In light of this principle, it is considered that
 - (i) host governments and UNHCR should take lead roles;
 - (ii) refugees and local populations should be involved in environmental planning and projects;
 - (iii) coordination with and assistance from other UN agencies and international NGOs should be promoted; and
 - (iv) in cases where environmental damage is extensive, development funds should be sought.

2.3.3. Emergency phase

11. Since major components of camp operations, such as site selection and layout, are decided at this stage, UNHCR's operations in the emergency phase must be designed to take environmental factors into account effectively.

2.3.4. Care-and-maintenance phase

12. Sound environmental management must be introduced and maintained at this stage. For this purpose, guidance must be provided to field staff on integration of environmental components in programming and project implementation. Such guidance must be flexible enough to allow for major differences in local conditions.

2.3.5. Durable solutions

13. The environmental damage left by refugees must be repaired, when necessary, in the light of future development plans for the area concerned. For this purpose, appropriate planning should be undertaken, involving all major actors. A mechanism should be set up to sustain rehabilitation activities on a long-term basis. In the case of local integration, refugee settlement projects need to be developed, incorporating environmental concerns to ensure sustainability.

III. Operational Outcomes

14. To implement the organisational principles outlined above, a number of operational outcomes have been identified. These outcomes will find concrete expression in Guidelines which will be developed for the Organisation. The major outcomes may be summarised as follows:

3.1. General

3.1.1 Integration

Inclusion of a section on environmental management in the UNHCR Manual, particularly in chapter 4

Incorporation of environmental concerns into sectoral guidelines/manuals, in line with established UNHCR environmental policies

Preparation of a user-friendly environmental source book of ideas for implementing environmental projects

Further promotion of environmentally friendly procurement

3.1.2. Coordination

Consultation meetings with host governments, donor institutions, other UN agencies and selected NGOs

Closer coordination within UNHCR Headquarters

3.2. Emergency phase

3.2.1. Integration

Inclusion of environmental concerns in the Handbook for Emergencies.

Inclusion of an environmental specialist in the emergency team, in situations where potentially serious environmental impacts are expected

Inclusion of environmental preservation in special appeals, as an integral part of refugee assistance operations

3.2.2. Coordination

Establishment of a working relationship with the environmental authorities in the host government

3.2.3. Training

Training of emergency team staff in environmental principles of site selection, design and emergency operations

3.2.4. Information

Creation of an environmental data base, which should provide up-to-date information for emergency planning purposes.

3.3. Care-and-maintenance phase

3.3.1. Integration

Fielding of an environmental coordinator for those refugee situations deemed to have serious impacts on the environment.

Preparation of an Environmental Strategy and Action Plan, wherever necessary, with the help of environmental coordinators in the field. The former should be reflected in the Country Operations Plan and the latter in programming.

Establishment of a local environmental task force for regular coordination among major actors concerned

Inclusion of a section on environment in the budget submission, to ensure that the country's Environmental Strategy and Action Plan are translated into the programming cycle

Inclusion of a section on environment, where necessary, in Letters of Instruction

Inclusion of an environmental clause in all related project agreements with host governments and implementing partners

3.3.2. Technology

Promotion of applied and action-oriented research to foster new technical solutions to environmental problems

3.3.3. Coordination

Coordination of policy and planning with other UN agencies, to ensure coherent environmental activities in the field

Involvement of donors in the early stages of refugee operations concerning the environment

3.3.4. Participation

Full involvement and utilisation of NGOs according to their specific technical capacities concerning the environment

Involvement of refugees and local communities in the planning and implementation of all environmental projects and activities

3.3.5. Training/Education

Development of staff training modules and the establishment of a staff training programme for the field and Headquarters

Planning and implementation of environmental education programmes, both formal and informal

3.3.6. Information

Inclusion of environmental data in UNHCR statistical reports, and the SITREP reporting system

Gathering and dissemination of refugee-related environmental information

Promotion of public information activities and materials, to publicise the efforts of UNHCR and its partners to address refugee-related environmental problems

3.4. **Durable solutions**

3.4.1. Limited rehabilitation schemes

Introduction of an environmental rehabilitation scheme, with contributions from UNHCR and the host government

Development of an environmental rehabilitation plan to keep a sound coordination among all related activities.

3.4.2. Large scale rehabilitation schemes

Preparation of an environmental rehabilitation programme in collaboration with the host government, other UN agencies and donors, where extensive rehabilitation is needed. UNHCR's role should be limited to taking a leading role in setting up large scale environmental rehabilitation programmes, making modest financial contributions to their initial activities and projects and playing a catalytic role in attracting other resources.

IV. Conclusion

15. The above reflects the increasingly focused UNHCR policy on refugees and environmental issues. It also lays the basis for practical, definite guidelines to give effect to that policy.