

2.1 INTRODUCTION

*"... we were doing well [until] the war started. All of a sudden everything changed, there were too many people dying. A lot of families were trying to escape, but we held on till the last minute. I decided it was time to move when my father and uncle were killed. We left one night and left everything we owned behind, and just fled for our lives. I have ten children, and luckily all of them were home that night... We walked for weeks, walking all night and hiding during the day." **

The shock of having to leave home and the circumstances of life as a refugee, particularly in the early stages of an emergency create major emotional and social problems and exacerbate existing ones. The trauma of flight and its aftermath may leave refugees confused, frightened, lonely and insecure, facing an unknown future in a strange or even hostile environment.

One of the most important actions that can be taken to help reduce the shock and stress for the community as a whole is to provide security and a sense of stability as quickly as possible. In part this can be done materially (by providing food, shelter, water, clothing and health care) and through protection. However, the psychological and emotional welfare of the community is dependent on other factors and unless appropriate action is taken to help the refugees adjust to their situation, their sense of loss and isolation may deepen even in circumstances of relative material well being.

Such action should involve refugees, from the beginning, in the organization of all aspects of their new lives and in particular in the search for durable solutions. Activities focusing on restoring "normality" will provide a sense of purpose and direction - for the community as a whole, as well as for individual refugees. Among these, family reunion should be given priority, as loss or separation from family members is a major cause of emotional stress.

The immediate objective of a social welfare service in an emergency situation should be the identification of and assistance to those persons whose basic needs for food, water, shelter and health care are not being met. Particular attention should be given to persons who may be vulnerable if they lack family support: children, the disabled, elderly refugees and women. Other groups within the general refugee population may also experience problems in meeting their basic needs: because of their status as a minority (religious, ethnic, etc.), because of inequities in the distribution system, or for other reasons.

A social welfare service should mobilize appropriate community resources, with outside help as necessary, to screen the refugee population for those facing urgent problems; see these needs are met and ensure the general welfare of all refugees. Having established such a foundation, a social welfare service can proceed to deal with such special needs as rehabilitation of the disabled, establishing self reliance and training programmes, and developing community activities.

* Taken from case studies reported in K. Hancock, *"Refugee Women and Children in Somalia, their social and psychological needs,"* UNICEF, Mogadiscio 1988. (Also passages quoted on pages 57, 61 and 75.)

Key Points

The needs and resources assessment is the basis for setting priorities and planning action.

Defining an area as a "social services responsibility" at the stage of the needs and resources assessment assumes prematurely that a social service will be needed to solve any problem.

Focus on the population as a whole, rather than on specific individuals.

Needs and resources change over time.

The type of needs assessment made should be tailored to the situation.

Use a variety of sources (existing data, expert opinion, the refugees themselves) for cross-checking and validating information.

Consider how problem would have been resolved by refugees in the country of origin.

Refugees most in need are often the least likely to make their needs known. Make sure they are not overlooked.

Give equal weight to 'resources' .

Social services staff must be involved in the broad assessment of the population.

2.2 NEEDS and RESOURCES ASSESSMENT

Questions needing answers:

Who are the refugees?

What are their priorities?

What can they do for themselves?

What could they do for themselves with some help?

In order to respond to refugees' needs we must understand what they lack to live a full *human life*. Needs vary from the very basic ones of food, clothing and shelter, to the less tangible, the needs of self-esteem, to belong, to be loved and to be able to grow. While basic physical requirements are easily identified in an emergency, the deeper human needs, which are not so easily perceived, often do not receive the same attention. However, it is essential that the whole range of human needs is understood from the beginning, in order that planning for long-term durable solutions can be set in place.

It should be borne in mind, however, that needs will change and a reassessment will have to be made so that new plans and goals can be put in place to ensure that assistance is provided in the most appropriate way. The diagram on the next page illustrates this cycle.

A needs assessment can take hours, days, or weeks depending on the urgency of the situation, the range of needs, problems and resources examined, the size of the population, the methods used to collect information, the ease or difficulty with which information can be obtained, the personnel available, the process of analysis. Response to a true emergency should not be delayed pending completion of a detailed needs assessment. **Tailor the process to the degree of urgency or stability of the situation.**

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Three sources of information which may be used for assessing needs are **existing data, expert opinion** and the **refugees themselves**. Use information from all three, for cross-checking and validating information. (See box on page 17) An area for particular attention is the gathering of *information on how certain problems would've been resolved by refugees in their country of origin*.

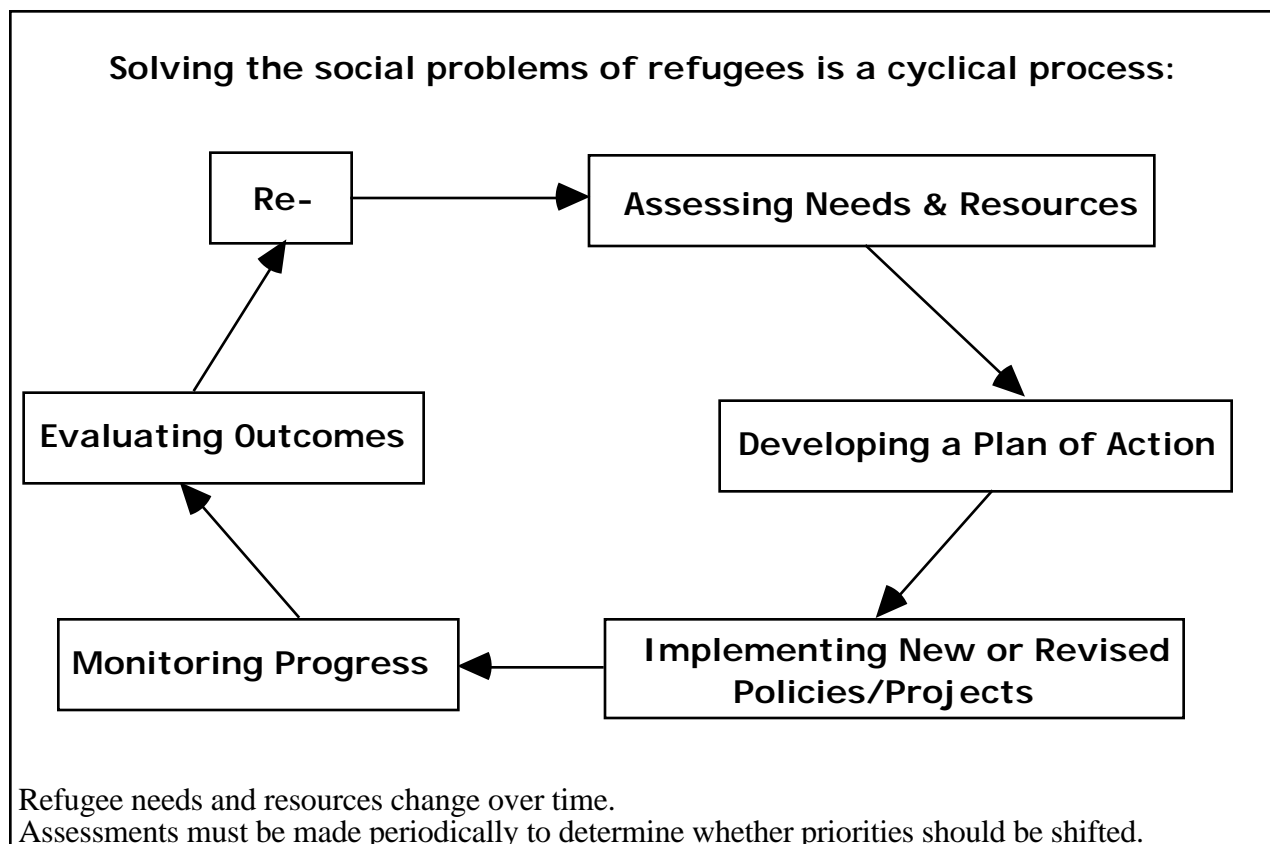
RESOURCES

Comparing Needs and Resources: Problems result when the resources available to a population are inadequate to meet the needs of the entire population; are not appropriate to certain needs; are not accessible to all who need them; are not culturally acceptable to some or all of the population concerned.

There is sometimes tendency to focus more on outstanding needs and problems than on the resources available. This can lead to faulty analysis and inappropriate programmes.

Give attention to the following "resources"

- Government, agency and UNHCR assistance provided for basic needs
- Existing social service projects
- The range of skills the refugees themselves possess
- Traditional "coping mechanisms" of the refugee population
- Tools, equipment and other items that the refugees already have
- Technical assistance available from:
 - * Government departments
 - * NGOs
 - * UNHCR Social Services and Education Officers
 - * Other UN bodies
- Potential funding for projects from UNHCR or other sources
- Local organizations and religious bodies



Sources of Information

1. Existing Data

Before starting a survey, see what statistical information is already available. Sources include: registration forms, medical statistics on types of illnesses, causes of death, nutritional status, etc.

Advantages

This information is relatively my and inexpensive to obtain. Statistics can indicate which part of a refugee population is affected by a problem.

Disadvantages

Find out how and when existing statistics were developed. They are of limited value if: they are out of date, they were not collected properly or do not cover all the areas to be assessed. Statistics based on services requested may underestimate the extent of a problem. Often the most needy refugees are unable to get to the place where services are.

2. Expert Opinion

The groups shown right may be able to give direct information on refugee problems or provide background on how these problems develop and how they can be solved.

Staff who have been working directly with the refugees concerned.
Government officials responsible for refugee matters.
Refugee leaders.
Teachers in local schools.
Workers in local voluntary organizations.
Social welfare experts from a local university, government welfare office or the UN system.

Advantages

This information can be gathered easily and quickly. First-hand experience can be particularly valuable. Case examples help clarify how problems develop. They also add a human dimension to statistics.

Disadvantages

There is always the possibility that one person's view may be biased or inaccurate. Experience with a limited number of cases may not justify general assumptions about the actual extent of a problem.

3. General Refugee Population

When refugee problems are assessed, it is essential to get information from the people most directly concerned. Information can be obtained from refugees through specially-called meetings, a general survey, social case histories or informal contacts.

Advantages

The obvious advantage of information from refugees is that they have first-hand experience of the problem.

Disadvantages

Meetings may not represent the views of the population as a whole. Surveys are usually time-consuming and expensive and do not produce valid results unless they are properly done. Informal contacts present a limited and possibly biased view.

ANALYZING THE SITUATION

The following questions suggest the kind of analysis that begins during the collection of information on needs, resources and problems. The answers will provide a framework for action.

Determining Severity and Extent:	How extreme are the problems? What part of the population do they affect?
Identifying Root Causes:	What is the reason for the problem? Why is a need not being met properly?
Understanding Inter-Relationships:	Does a particular problem result or lead to any others? Are the resources currently being used having the desired effect? If not, why? Would a proposed solution be likely to have any side-effects? Would these be positive or negative?
Identifying Barriers:	What prevents the refugees from solving the problem on their own?
Researching Previous Efforts:	Have others tried to resolve the same problem elsewhere in the country? In other countries? What worked and what did not?
Selecting Points of Intervention:	Should attention be given to the causes of a problem, barriers to a solution or the effects? Should each be addressed?

2.2 Needs and Resources Assessment Check List

1. What is the demographic composition of the population? Percentage of men, women and children?
2. What are the ethnic, linguistic and cultural characteristics of the refugee population.
3. What is the average family size and the typical household arrangements?
4. What are their traditional and normal life-styles?
5. What resources have they brought with them?
6. Are they able to survive and support themselves, at least in the beginning?
7. Are cultural factors being respected or taken into account in the planning of assistance?
8. How are basic needs being met (by outside aid, local population, local government, NGOs) and how is this given?
9. Are basic needs being met?
10. What are the refugees doing to help themselves? Are traditional coping mechanisms reactivated? If not, for what reasons?
11. How can dependency be avoided? Are all opportunities for self-help being facilitated?
12. Is the condition of the refugees better or worse than that of the host population? What is different? Why? What can be done to avoid conflict?
13. What resources are on hand and en route from all sources?
14. What unmet needs exist?
15. What further problems/needs might be anticipated?
16. What are the priorities as seen by the refugees themselves?
17. Which are the priority target groups and how might the priority needs be met?
18. What criteria should be used for allocation and distribution of services and assistance? Are they flexible enough to allow the inclusion of late-comers immediately?
19. How long did the flight take?
20. Have arrangements for self-help groups been established?
21. Have community leaders, workers, health professionals, TBAs and teachers been identified and mobilized?

Key Points

The plan of action should be based on the findings of the needs and resources assessment.

Build consensus among groups involved (including refugees) on problems to be addressed, action to be taken and by whom, and on a timetable of specific activities.

Ensure coordination between sectors.

Incorporate mechanisms monitoring and evaluating interventions.

Revise plan in accordance with the needs of the situation.

Establish a framework of policies and priorities.

Relate problems and possible action to the local non refugee population.

Identify constraints that will limit action.

Establish a balance between rural and urban areas.