THE SOMALIA OPERATION:

SUMMARY OF LESSONS LEARNED AND IMPLICATIONS

FOR UNHCR EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

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I. Introduction

Purposes of the mission

From 24 March to 6 April a mission, composed of two members of INTERTECT and one staff member of UNHCR, visited Somalia to review the emergency operations. The objectives were:

1. To examine the emergency operations in order to study how UNHCR responds to situations of this type and to observe the procedures, staffing and methods of operating by which UNHCR responds to an emergency situation.

2. To assess the operational capabilities of UNHCR in the Somalia operation and to draw out the lessons learned for future relief operations in similar environments and circumstances.

Specifically, the mission was concerned with the following:

A. Preparedness of UNHCR for the emergency;

B. Operations planning;

C. Decentralization of decision-making;

D. Staffing patterns;

E. Co-ordination with voluntary organizations as implementing partners;

F. Information requirements.

The Somalia case study is part of a comprehensive study on emergency preparedness and response capabilities of UNHCR as outlined in PCS/411 of 26 July 1979 and the terms of reference in PCS/551 dated 23 November 1979.

II. Summary of Major Points

A. Preparedness of HCR

The Somalia operation was essentially an emergency that developed from a long-term, almost static, refugee situation. The experience in Somalia shows that HCR was not prepared to deal with this type of situation. Not only was response to the emergency, when it was identified, slow, there was no accurate means of determining that a change in the static situation was developing. There were no surveillance procedures in place or monitoring of the normal indicators that would show that there was a change and a growing problem. When the situation was recognized for what it was by the Branch Office, it then took months for the HCR bureaucracy to respond properly. When it was realised that a large number of new refugees were arriving, the staff was unprepared for a proper assessment of the situation, which would lead to a proper and timely response.

In order to be prepared for this type of emergency, HCR should establish procedures for monitoring a situation and establish indicators that will quickly provide administrators with information relating to emergency needs. In short, HCR must provide information and training to field officers on how to assess, where to assess and what to assess, in order to pinpoint needs.

The experience in Somalia also underscores the need for HCR to develop the capability of monitoring events on a region-wide basis, especially where potential conflict between countries may lead to an emergency operation. The events that led to this emergency were known far in advance of the arrival of the new refugees and adequate forewarning was given so that the emergency measures could have been taken prior to the time when the situation became difficult to handle.

The Somalia experience also indicates that field officers are not prepared to deal with the technical aspects of refugee needs assessment. At the time the emergency started, the professional staff consisted of no more than two men, neither of whom has had prior experience or training in needs assessment. While various missions were sent from HQ to assist in determining needs, the information provided was general and not specific enough to assist in the specifics of programme development. In order to assist the Government and implementing partners adequately, HCR must develop adequate assessment capability, either through training field officers or by developing a team of assessment specialists. Reliance on

voluntary agencies and the Government to carry out this assessment proved, in the Somalia case, to be unsatisfactory.

B.   Operations planning

The Somalia experience has underscored the fact that UNHCR is unprepared for adequate operations planning, either for its own staff and operations needs or to advise counterparts and the host Government. While in general the staff does understand that certain tasks are required, or that certain staff positions must be filled, the specific duties and requirements of each position are poorly delineated. Management principles, procedures and methods are not known, or not understood. Even some of the most basic concepts, such as standardization, pooling and flow charting are not practised.

The principles and procedures of operations management are not difficult to master. Guidelines can be formulated, procedures can be developed and the proper forms printed, and the basic training in operations planning for managers can be instituted, thereby achieving a much higher range of results. UNHCR can be expected to confront a wide range of operational circumstances in the future; even when not in an operational situation, HCR will be expected to advise counterparts and/or the host Government on setting up and managing operations. To improve proficiency, the organization should provide basic operations planning and management skills to potential heads and staffs of field offices, develop a small corps of operations experts to assist, on a temporary basis, Branch Offices in setting up emergency operations and establish procedures whereby these operations can be easily and swiftly administered and monitored.

C.   Decentralization of decision-making

It is recognized that the highly political and sensitive nature of situations such as Somalia requires the closest co-ordination between Headquarters and the Branch Office. Nonetheless, in order to respond adequately to emergency needs, greater delegation of authority should be made to the HCR official who is on the spot. Many of the weaknesses and shortcomings of HCR's programme in Somalia are directly attributable to this lack of authority. The problems relating to staffing and procurement are particular areas of concern in the Somalia operation. In order for HCR to be effective in its emergency response, one or a combination of

the following should occur: all or portions of the procedures in BAFI should be waived or streamlined, or simplified procedures should go into effect or new procedures designed especially for the emergency situations should temporarily supercede BAFI.

D. Staffing patterns

Many of the problems related to adequate assessment of the situation and deficiencies in the planning of support operations for the refugees can be attributed to the fact that HCR does not have on its staff technicians who can provide advice and immediate support in the technical fields during an emergency. Traditionally HCR has relied on voluntary agencies or consultants to fill this gap. The experience in Somalia shows that the voluntary agencies can provide only a limited range of technical services. In many cases, the staff provided are inexperienced or improperly trained to deal with conditions in developing countries. HCR must have a small team of people whom it can rely upon to provide information and advice appropriate to the needs of refugees in developing countries. HCR should either retain such personnel in-house, or develop a special arrangement whereby such personnel can be seconded almost instantaneously to a Branch Office when an emergency develops. The latter option will require a much more specific arrangement than simply a roster of experts or a series of standing agreements with voluntary agencies. The technical experts must work together as a team and have complementary skills, otherwise the situation will not be rectified.

E. Co-ordination with voluntary agencies as implementing partners

The diverse range of experience, qualifications and capabilities of the agencies chosen to implement HCR's programmes in Somalia demonstrates the need for HCR to develop mechanisms whereby a higher quality and level of service can be provided on a fairly uniform basis for the refugees. The disparity between levels of service in the various camps provided under the auspices of different voluntary agencies shows that HCR must not only strive to ascertain that agencies are competent in their assigned work, but also provide a uniform standard of service as well as a basic minimal level of service to the refugees. In order to do this, HCR should do three things: 1) develop model minimum standards for each refugee camp operation carried out by a voluntary agency or other entity

contracted and/or paid for by HCR; 2) develop an assessment capability to monitor the effectiveness of voluntary agency programmes carried out under the auspices of HCR; 3) develop a screening process for determining the competence of the voluntary agencies and their key field personnel prior to their being contracted by HCR.

F.   Information requirements

Many of the problems in the specific operations in Somalia are related to the lack of information available to the staff and the implementing agencies; not even the standard references on refugee camp operations, nor the basic manuals developed for this type of emergency, nor the pamphlets and training aids that are utilized by many other agencies world-wide, were available in Somalia.   In order to be more effective and to place a greater range of information in the hands of the administrators, HCR should: 1) develop a field officers' handbook of information that would be required for emergency operations; 2) develop a basic library of information on field operations, and provide it in multiple copies to Branch Offices; 3) establish links to information centres such as VITA, the Intermediate Technology Development Group, the Oxford Polytechnic Disaster Reference Service and the INTERTECT Disaster Information Service.

III. Summary of specific lessons from Somalia

A. Administration

1. The role of HCR

Lessons and implications for emergency preparedness – It is clear from this
experience that HCR will often be called upon to take an active though not
completely operational, role in emergency operations. There are various levels,
or increments, of involvement, beginning with the traditional passive roles
of HCR, moving to more active funding and technical assistance roles, and
ultimately a fully operational role. A changing situation may require an
escalation of involvement beyond that foreseen in the initial stages. Thus
training and management systems should be developed which take into account
the possibilities of incremental levels of involvement and define specific
parameters and activities at each level.

2. Organizing the field staff

Lessons learned and implications for emergency preparedness – Guidance on
preparing tables of organization should be included in an Emergency Operations
Handbook prepared for field officers and Branch Offices, and should be included
in the staff training programme.

3. Recruiting local staff

* Lessons learned and implications for emergency preparedness – The personnel
employment practices of HCR do not facilitate emergency response. There are
three options for improving the situation:

a. Waiving the existing procedures during the initial stages and granting
authority to the Branch Office to hire a limited number of staff on the spot;

b. Revising or streamlining the existing procedures;

c. Developing alternative procedures that can go into effect once an emer-
gency has been declared by the High Commissioner.

In most of the developing countries a variety of technical personnel can
be found working on development projects. These often make excellent temporary
additions to an emergency operations staff. If the above changes are under-
taken, HCR can more easily take advantage of this resource.

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* Denotes a finding comparable to a recommendation of the Bangkok seminar.

4. Job specifications for field operations

*   <u>Lessons and implications for emergency preparedness</u> — Sample job specifications should be developed and included in a Handbook for Emergency Operations for the field staff, and guidance should be provided as to the specific technical fields and roles of technicians that correspond to resolution of specific relief problems. In short, it is not adequate simply to request an engineer: one must know the specific type of engineer to request in order to match the appropriate professional to the problem.

5. Monitoring

<u>Lessons and implications for emergency preparedness</u> — UNHCR should develop model accounting and monitoring systems for use by implementing partners, which provide information in a form that can be used both to monitor the existing situation and to forecast future needs. Furthermore, HCR must provide staff training on what the <u>indicators</u> are that point to potential problems, and how to develop and verify data to assess future needs.

6. Communications and field reporting

<u>Lessons and implications for emergency preparedness</u> — UNHCR should develop standardized reporting procedures for field operations, and train field officers on what types of information to communicate and how to weight the messages in such a way as to clarify their relative importance during transmission. When extraordinary messages are sent, they can then receive the proper attention. Communications discipline must be established and maintained in order to reduce overall confusion and to ensure that priority messages receive proper note.

*   The remoteness of the refugee camps in Somalia argues for the development of a variety of radio communications systems, which could be identified and acquired by UNHCR and stockpiled for emergency operations use. Experience has shown, however, that governments are often reluctant to allow radio equipment in politically sensitive areas. Therefore, UNHCR should identify those frequencies that could be used and include the use of this equipment — at the specified frequencies — as part of the operations agreement signed with the Government in the initial stages of the operation.

7. Procurement

Lessons learned and implications for emergency preparedness – Procurement is one of the major activities of UNHCR in field operations. The normal procurement procedures must be waived or extensively streamlined, and emergency procedures must be established that decentralize procurement authority to the Branch Office. However, if this is to be successful, HCR must also establish purchasing systems and procedures to ensure that local purchasing not only enables the Office to respond quickly but also provides information for monitoring the flow of goods through the system from the time they are purchased to the time they arrive in the hands of the refugees, as well as providing data that will enable the Office to monitor consumption and establish contingency planning.

The lack of information on the status of requests and relief goods in the pipeline underscores another problem facing HCR: if HCR is not operational, the Government or voluntary agencies will develop and use their own procurement and logistic systems. As most of these agencies do not have systems designed to provide information for use in contingency planning, it is often difficult for HCR – and indeed all the participants – to gather accurate information on material aid. HCR should therefore develop a model system, which can be provided to the Government and/or the implementing agencies, which will systematically provide information on the status of relief supplies. This should be given to implementors at the initial stages of the operation, so that it can be institutionalized before the other systems that would not provide the necessary information can be put into effect.

8. Logistics

Lessons learned and implications for emergency preparedness – Logistics are not necessarily complicated. There are standard transport equations and tables for planning, and systems and forms for monitoring that can easily be adapted for use by HCR. A model system should be chosen and included in a handbook for field officers on emergency operations, so that an effective method can be employed early in the operation. When an operation reaches a certain level, a professional logistics expert should be sent to assist the field office.

9. Staff vehicles

Lessons learned and implications for emergency preparedness – To the greatest extent possible, field offices should standardize vehicle purchases and, where necessary, develop the capacity to provide maintenance for vehicles used by HCR and counterpart agencies.

In situations where imported vehicles not used locally are required, vehicle maintenance agreements should be developed with the manufacturer's representatives. A number of companies such as Toyota, Nissan Motors and Volkswagen have trained personnel who can be contracted to provide complete vehicular maintenance services in special situations. UNHCR should contact the various manufacturers and establish prior agreements whereby maintenance teams could be sent to an area where maintenance facilities are lacking.

10. Accounting

Lessons learned and implications for emergency preparedness – When an emergency is encountered, the Branch Office should be supplemented with an accountant and a specialized emergency accounting system should be instituted. A number of model systems, appropriate to specific types of operations, should be developed in advance and should be included in an Emergency Operations Handbook for field officers.

11. Procedures

Lessons learned and implications for emergency preparedness – Among the critical areas cited by the Branch Office in which improvements are recommended, are:

a. the speed-up of processing of Letters of Instruction;

b. the need to increase authorization for immediate local expenditures to comparative UN levels (for example, the UNDP ResRep can commit up to US$400,000 without authorization from its Headquarters. It was pointed out that, were it not for the implementing partners, no purchases could have been made until several months after the emergency was identified.)

12. Resources for emergencies

Lessons learned and implications for emergency preparedness – When an emergency occurs, the local staff must be supplemented by personnel who have experience in technical assistance matters. In some instances, trained technicians should be added to the staff immediately in order to provide assistance to the Branch Office until implementing partners can be identified and brought in to conduct the field operations in various sectors. In order to facilitate technical assistance, several items were needed, including a resource index, a field library with basic information relating to technical assistance requirements, and guides to operational issues. A list of voluntary agencies and their specialities and capabilities, as well as private companies and research institutions with specialized capabilities in the relief or development fields, should also be provided. Orientation concerning basic technical assistance and related issues should be provided in a professional development course for potential field officers and branch managers.

13. Operational capabilities

Lessons learned and implications for emergency preparedness – In order to **improve the operational capabilities of HCR and provide a balanced team for** the emergency, two actions are recommended (in addition to those outlined earlier under "staffing"):

a. When an emergency is declared, a small team of specialists should be sent from Geneva to supplement the field staff; this team should be a corps of specialists from within HCR who are field-oriented (the field staff of the Somali operation concurs with the report of the Bangkok Seminar, that an emergency action group coordinated within the appropriate Regional Section of HCR during emergencies should provide this type of support.)

b. The capabilities of HCR staff in emergency operations should be enhanced through a professional development programme wherein disaster management training is provided as well as orientation as to how to conduct field operations. The latter is currently provided to a limited extent to new staff in HCR; it is felt, however, that a more rigorous professional development programme should be instituted for the staff who are likely to become representatives or programme officers in a disaster area. This training should be provided on a recurrent basis, so that new information and techniques, as well as the experience of past operations, can be brought into UNHCR emergency operations.

14. Improving liaison with voluntary agencies

Lessons learned and implications for emergency preparedness – The objectives of liaison with voluntary organizations working with or under HCR should be:

a. To ensure that all refugees receive a basic minimal standard of support and services;

b. To co-ordinate the services offered by the voluntary agencies to ensure that no gaps in the services or levels of services occur;

c. To ensure that all refugees receive equal services.

To accomplish these aims, HCR should:

a. Provide leadership and direction through participation in voluntary agency programme planning;

b. Provide technical information, such as a central library on relief operations and programmes;

c. Institute ongoing information sharing activities at all levels such as regular coordination meetings, seminars, and provision of technical personnel to informally assess voluntary agency programmes.

d. Develop, with participation of the voluntary agencies, uniform standards and policies for the programmes being carried out by the voluntary agencies.

To be prepared for these activities, HCR should:

* a. Develop a set of model standards which can be used by the Branch Office as a guide for developing local standards.

* b. Compile a mini reference library of technical information for use by Branch Offices.

15. Improving liaison with the host Government

Lessons learned and implications for emergency preparedness – To be effective in liaison with a host government, two levels of involvement are required: political and technical. The political is not subject to any standard rules and each case must be dealt with individually. On the technical level, HCR can be more effective by being prepared to deal with the technical issues and problems that arise (and in many cases, in the routine day-to-day contact with a government, it is the technical questions that predominate). The steps required in order for HCR to improve its technical liaison capabilities are generally the same as those recommended for improving liaison with voluntary agencies.

B. Camp operations

1. Siting of refugee camps

Lessons learned and implications for emergency preparedness – Simple
information on camp planning practices and the siting of camps along river
streams is available from a number of sources, including WHO, several
voluntary agencies, and INTERTECT. Information of this type can be collected
and provided to the Government or counterpart agencies immediately upon the
outbreak of an emergency situation. This type of information can also be
provided in an Emergency Operations Handbook.

2. Water

Lessons learned and implications for emergency preparedness – UNHCR
should identify, in advance, water resource development experts and organiza-
tions with the equipment and staff to develop and protect water resources and
send them to the site at the outset of an emergency operation.

3. Sanitation

Lessons learned and implications for emergency preparedness – Sanitation
must be stressed in operations preparedness. One of the very first installa-
tions in a refugee camp should be the latrine system, and all HCR field
staff should continually stress the importance of sanitation to the counter-
part and implementing agencies. Guidelines for planning refugee camps
should be established and a specific line item for sanitation facilities
and equipment should be prominently displayed on the budget forms. Beyond
this, HCR can take other measures; great strides have recently been made
in developing sanitation units, such as the Aqua privy and the OXFAM sanita-
tion unit, for refugee camp usage. HCR should develop models of its own
choosing and arrange in advance for mass production of these units ; also,
standing orders should be arranged so that large quantities can be provided
by the manufacturer at short notice.

Adequate sanitation also requires an active vector control programme,
especially to control flies. In the early stages of an operation, before
latrines are installed, vector control can play an important part in
controlling disease, especially in situations where the open environment

is used for defecation. Controlling the flies that would breed in the
waste material can buy time until a complete sanitation system is in-
stalled. For preparedness, HCR should identify suppliers of hand-sprayers
and the appropriate chemicals, and procure and send them during the
initial stages to the Branch Office.

4. Garbage disposal

Lessons learned and implications for emergency preparedness - Garbage
collection is usually one of the areas most overlooked in providing a
safe environment in a refugee camp. The disposal of medical waste, in
particular, is an area that needs adequate fore-thought and planning.
This, of course, should be the concern of the implementing partner -
indeed, most professional agencies would have the proper facilities and
take proper care to see that waste disposal was carried out. It should
be a function of HCR to check with agencies to make sure that adequate
provisions are being undertaken. This, as well as other inspections of
the activities carried out by counterparts and implementing agencies,
should be part of a routine inspection checklist for camp operations.

C. Feeding and nutrition

1. Basic rations

Lessons learned and implications for emergency preparedness - Normal roles
for HCR in basic rations are:

- To assist the host government in assessing needs;
- To formulate appeals for food;
- To coordinate donations;
- To provide logistics support when food arrives.

Of these, HCR has no standardized system for needs assessment, especially
in formulating caloric and nutrient content requirements, nor are staff mem-
bers cognizant of the basic issues in nutrition; the formulation of appeals
is imprecise due to the lack of knowledge about local nutritional and feed-
ing habits; the ability to coordinate donations is limited by lack of moni-
toring capability; and logistics support is limited to purchasing vehicles.

An additional role which UNHCR should play is advising the Government
on record keeping and monitoring of food supplies but this cannot be accom-

plished at present due to a lack of experienced or trained personnel and model systems.

If HCR is to be effective in each of these roles, it must take appropriate action to rectify these deficiencies. While many of these tasks can be delegated to WFP or other implementing agencies, HCR must retain the capability of making credible evaluations of the contractors' performance.

2. Supplementary feeding

Lessons learned and implications for emergency preparedness – Supplementary feeding programmes are an activity that is always required in a refugee camp environment. It serves to protect the vulnerable groups but also is an ideal programme for delivery of other services such as preventive health and medical programmes, health surveillance activities, public health education, and monitoring of the basic ration distribution. Normally HCR will contract a voluntary agency or the host government to provide this service. As important as these programme are, HCR personnel must be conversant with the basic issues involved in setting up and running such a programme. In order to be properly prepared for selecting the appropriate agency and seeing that adequate programmes are established, HCR should take the following steps:

a. Provide the Branch Office with literature on the establishment and operation of these programmes. Suitable references for non-medical and -nutrition personnel are available.

b. Establish close linkages with agencies that are recognized specialists in this type of programme and contract them at early stages of the emergency to provide advice on setting up the programmes.

c. Develop model standards which can be used or adapted to guide agencies in setting up programmes. (The standards developed in Thailand (UNHCR, 1980) provide a current example.)

d. Establish a closer link to WFP and WHO emergency operations personnel who are specifically concerned with this activity.

e. Develop a mechanism whereby a nutritionist/feeding programme specialist can be seconded quickly to the Branch Office to assist in determining the scope of the required programme. (At present this is left to WFP, but often they do not assign an experienced specialist. Thus HCR should have the capability to provide this expertise if WFP cannot.)

In order to serve as a back-up feeding system capable of smoothing out temporary shortages and insuring that the vulnerable groups will always have adequate food, the supplementary feeding programme should receive separate stocks of food. If possible, independent supplies should be established. The best way this can be effectively accomplished is to utilize the "food agencies" that have their own sources of supply and their own logistics. HCR should develop standing agreements with these groups to provide stand-by services in emergencies.

3. Intensive feeding

Lessons learned and implications for emergency preparedness – HCR Branch Offices can be made more conversant with this type of programme by provision of the available, non-technical literature as well as a guide to the basic issues. Information regarding all types of feeding programmes and the conditions when they are required should be a part of UNHCR staff training.

D. Health programs

Lessons learned and implications for emergency preparedness – HCR field staff are generally unprepared to deal with health-related programmes, and specifically they are not conversant with the issues related to preventive vs. curative health programmes. To help field staff become more proficient in these areas, UNHCR should:

a. Provide basic background data relating to the issues surrounding health programmes and priorities in emergencies and refugee camps. This data could be presented in a handbook for field officers and included in a staff training programme.

b. Set up a regular seminar programme with the WHO Emergency Relief Operations Division to provide orientation on health matters to HQ staff likely to be sent on missions.

To help ensure that the voluntary agencies working with UNHCR are qualified, greater participation of the WHO Emergency Relief Operations Division should be encouraged in the screening, selection and orientation of these agencies.

E. Social services

Lessons learned and implications for emergency preparedness - The recep-
tion and processing of new arrivals, and special programmes for unaccompanied
minors, are two services for which preparedness activities are needed at
the outset of emergency operations. Simple systems for reception and pro-
cessing have been worked out and the necessary cards for registration can
be developed in advance and included in an Emergency Operations Handbook
for field officers so that, when an emergency occurs, the forms can be
translated and produced locally. Experience has shown that, if proper
registration is not carried out at an early stage, family reunions, the
tracing of unaccompanied minors, and the problem of re-establishment of
families within a refugee camp will all be delayed - indeed, in many cases
prevented. A model record-keeping system should be developed which follows
each refugee from his arrival to the final destination, with copies of the
information collected in a central data center. HCR can help deal with this
type of situation by providing this model system as well as guidance to its
counterparts and implementing agencies at the earliest stages of the emergency.

Unaccompanied minors are always one of the most sensitive social problems
of refugees. Special systems are required to register and trace unaccompanieds
and in many situations special attention is necessary to ensure that the
children receive adequate care. As mentioned earlier, in Somalia the
problem does not appear to be great; few children arrive unaccompanied by
their parents, and normally, if the parents are missing, other relatives
are usually present. Experience from other locations, however, most
recently Thailand, shows the need for HCR to be prepared, not only with
systems of registration and child care but also with formulated policies
relating to child care under these circumstances. Field officers should
be made aware of the issues related to unaccompanieds and the HCR Branch
Office should be prepared to move rapidly to act in the children's interests.

F. Personal supplies

Lessons learned and implications for emergency preparedness – In order to be properly prepared to deal with personal material needs, UNHCR should explore the following options:

a. Re-orient the purchasing system to allow for a greater level of localized purchases.

b. Conduct an investigation into the actual personal material aid requirements (by assessing what was used and how it was used in UNHCR's past experience) and develop material acquisition plans based on this report.

c. Where personal items are shown to be required in a certain region, UNHCR should develop lists of local supplies and keep them updated on a regular basis.