

MISCELLANEOUS

pictures to find out what they mean to illiterate people. Health educators work with school teachers in planning the health education of children and in preparing teachers to carry this out. They also conduct research on fundamental problems of communication in health matters.

Perhaps most important of all, they are professional persons, trained to look at health from the layman's point of view. They are able to complete a two-way exchange of information, conveying this point of view to the members of the health team and teaching the man in the street the part he can play in safeguarding his own health.

REFUGEES IN AFRICA

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, in Geneva, has produced an illustrated pamphlet under this title in which an account is given of the situation of refugees in a continent in which serious problems exist which can only be resolved by the co-ordination of the most varied aid, by governments as well as by the voluntary agencies.

It is known that the Red Cross has its place in this general effort and we therefore think it to be of interest to give some extracts of the preliminary article.

The creation of newly-independent states in Africa and the repercussions that this has had on territories which are still under colonial rule have provoked disturbances which, since 1961, have driven more than 650,000 people from their homes and their countries. Their destitution and distress might well have given rise to further internecine strife throughout the continent. Fortunately, this has not happened ; on the contrary, the refugees have always been allowed to cross frontiers and have found shelter and succour wherever they went, thus ensuring at least their survival. The

traditional hospitality shown by all African peoples has not failed the refugees from Rwanda, the Congo, the Sudan ; or those from Angola, Portuguese Guinea or Mozambique ; or any others forced into exile.

This is especially significant in view of the fact that often the populations of whole villages fled, sometimes even taking their cattle with them. Once across the border, often in a famished state, they found people in the host country willing to give them food, but this meant only that the limited local food supplies were more quickly exhausted. Outside aid then became essential, and governments have done their best to supply it as rapidly as possible, principally in the form of food and medical care. When international assistance is invoked at this stage it is of an emergency nature, mainly intended to avoid disaster.

Another major concern is to prevent incidents in the border areas which might lead to disputes with the countries from which the refugees have fled. The refugees are therefore moved a safe distance from the frontier as soon as possible, and every effort is made to persuade them to remain there.

Most refugees, it is true, nourish the hope of being able to return home soon but, circumstances being what they are, unfortunately this has proved possible only rarely. Indeed, when permanent settlement in the host country is officially suggested to them as the only solution, the refugees are generally receptive. A number of them, the refugees from Angola in the Congo for example, could be absorbed by the local population with which they have tribal links. For others, temporarily lodged in make-shift centers, the main objective is settlement in an environment conducive to a return to a normal existence as soon as possible. As the vast majority of them are peasants, or small craftsmen, this does not pose insurmountable difficulties. Apart from Burundi and Rwanda, which are overpopulated, most African countries of asylum offer sufficient land of reasonably good quality which has not been developed. Generally speaking, local populations are so sparsely scattered that the settlement of newcomers provokes no rivalry. However, the expense involved is much greater than host countries can afford. Financial and technical aid on a large scale is therefore needed in the preparatory stages. First, the land must be cleared of

MISCELLANEOUS

virgin forest or bush ; then the insects which carry malaria or sleeping sickness have to be destroyed. Roads must be built, and water supplies installed. All this has to be done before the refugees can be brought in and given the necessary tools and equipment to build their huts and start tilling the soil. For a time food has to be procured for them and, even if this is freely available from welfare sources, the cost of transporting it is often high. Furthermore, there is the distribution of seeds and the establishment of public services, however simple, such as dispensaries and schools...

The task of aiding refugees in these eight African countries has represented a vast and sudden increase in the responsibilities of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Indeed, when his office was first established under a resolution adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 14 December 1950, the problems coming within its scope concerned mainly European refugees. Beginning in 1957, further Assembly resolutions empowered him to assist, directly or indirectly, groups of refugees in other parts of the world ; first in Hong Kong and subsequently in Tunisia and Morocco during and after the struggle for Algerian independence. In early 1961 the request from the Congo for help in dealing with refugees from Angola proved to be the first in a series of appeals addressed, one after another, to the High Commissioner's Office by countries south of the Sahara. At the same time HCR was approached in connection with situations in other parts of the world, such as Macao and Nepal.

Faced with these many and varied new problems the High Commissioner found his responsibilities increasing not only in size but also in complexity. His annual budget, whose financing depends on voluntary governmental contributions, has however remained within the very modest proportions appropriate to HCR's character—set out in its Statute—as a non-operational body. Since he cannot himself undertake the full financing or the practical execution of projects of assistance or settlement, the High Commissioner acts as a catalytic agent to stimulate goodwill and to co-ordinate the ensuing efforts.

Action by his office therefore almost invariably follows this pattern : upon receiving a request for aid from a country of asylum,

it sends a representative to make an on-the-spot investigation and assess the most pressing needs. According to the findings, it may be decided to draw on the Emergency Fund which is made up of the repayment of loans made to European refugees under earlier programmes. Generally this allocation is minimal and is intended to meet only the most urgent needs, while other international bodies and welfare agencies concerned with refugees are asked to make contributions in cash or in kind, or to provide services. As a concrete instance of this the League of Red Cross Societies often agrees to send out teams to distribute food and provide medical care.

At the second stage, when a host government has decided to allow a group of refugees to settle and has asked for international assistance, HCR draws up a detailed programme, in consultation with the government itself and any agency which wishes to take part, setting forth an order of priorities and defining the rôle of each participant. . . .

Apart from financial considerations, the very nature of the problem makes it preferable that a number of organizations be included in refugee work. As the present High Commissioner, Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, told the Executive Committee at its spring session in 1966: "Multilateral aid offers guarantees for successful co-operation because of the variety of its components and the neutralizing effect which can be exercised by an intermediary which is so clearly impartial as UNHCR."

Because it guarantees impartially, the High Commissioner added, "Multilateral aid is more readily acceptable both to the countries of origin of the refugees and to the countries of asylum themselves." Multilateral aid obviates any suspicion that either the host country, or the refugees themselves, or the agencies which come to their help are politically motivated. The strictly humanitarian character of the aid given under HCR's aegis at the explicit request of the governments of countries of asylum ; its sole concern with the security and well-being of the refugees, brook no challenge.

Furthermore, multilateral aid is more effective in that it can draw upon a variety of experience which no single agency possesses. It should be remembered that in Africa, where newly emergent

states with overtaxed political and civil service institutions are struggling with the problems of economic under-development, settlement projects encounter numerous technical, economic and social difficulties.

It is also essential to ensure that anything done for refugees is planned in the context of the social and economic structure of the host country and is in harmony with its overall economic development. As the High Commissioner himself has said, his task is fulfilled when the refugees have reached the same standard of living as that of the people among whom they have settled.

However, in most cases this standard is so low that, even when they have reached it, the refugees cannot be considered as firmly settled. Like everyone else they should have hope for the future and prospects of improving their condition, especially if they are to accept the uprooting as a misfortune whose effects they can overcome through their own effort.

It devolves on other organizations, such as the U.N. Development Programme, working together with specialized agencies such as FAO, WHO and ILO, to help these aspirations to materialize through development projects of a more or less long-term nature that will benefit refugees and indigenous population alike. There is already useful co-operation between HCR and these bodies. This can certainly be tightened so that the work initiated by HCR and continued by others will exemplify the cohesion and efficiency that are necessary if concrete results are to be achieved in terms of increased prosperity and the maintenance of peace.

The maintenance of peace and increased prosperity are objectives of the United Nations. HCR intends to contribute to the achievement of these ends within the framework of assistance to refugees not only in Africa but elsewhere in the world.

It may seem that in Africa the needs of the hundreds of thousands of refugees who have sought shelter in adjacent or nearby countries are met in essence by projects of material assistance. However, it is no less important that the spontaneous welcome extended by governments and peoples be reinforced by certain basic guarantees as to the legal position of the refugees.

Unlike Europe, in Africa there is no individual screening procedure for establishing refugee status. Nevertheless, adequate protection for refugees requires that governments and their administrations formally subscribe to the application both of the right of asylum and to the principles governing treatment of refugees, as set forth in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

To date 50 countries have acceded to this Convention ; of these 19 are in Africa. Other countries, without formal accession, implicitly acknowledge the principles embodied in it.

Side by side with its efforts to encourage further accessions to the Convention, HCR also advises governments in drawing up measures that help to ensure an appropriate legal status for refugees. A particularly important administrative point is the issuing of identity cards and travel documents to refugees. . . .

DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

The International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) was formed in March 1962 out of a merger between three international non-governmental co-ordinating organizations working in the field of assistance to people in need. It is a practical body of co-operation for the entire non-governmental world and its present membership numbers about 100 organizations. Its rôle as a central bureau of liaison is to assist the voluntary agencies as and when possible in the improvement and growth of their programmes.

ICVA works through a General Conference and Governing Board, a series of commissions and working groups, and a Secretariat. Its General Conference is a world forum where agencies intergovernmental and governmental, as well as non-governmental exchange views and information on all topics of concern and help in programmes of assistance to people.