

Review of UNHCR Mass Information Activities



EPAU Evaluation Reports, 1 April 1998

I. BACKGROUND AND SCOPE

1. Communicating with large population groups in situations of crisis, or delivering vital information to refugees in an organised manner has been common practice in UNHCR ever since its creation. Structured, supportive information is a vital need for uprooted people in situations where societal structures have been shattered or have broken down. Whenever UNHCR faces large refugee flows or concentrations in the context of humanitarian crises, it needs to communicate with the concerned populations. Some of the methods UNHCR uses – distribution of leaflets and pamphlets, large meetings, dissemination of news by loudspeaker or radio – are also resorted to by what has come to be known as "mass information". But UNHCR only started to use the term in 1989.

2. At that time, UNHCR had been seriously concerned with the massive movements of people from Viet Nam. Under the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA), a strategy was adopted by the international community and UNHCR with the goal of trying to minimise illegal departures, within a humanitarian framework which took the protection preoccupations of UNHCR into account. A major innovation was the inclusion in this strategy of a mass information campaign aimed at transmitting simple messages to the Vietnamese population about the dangers of illegal departure, the serious legal and economic obstacles to resettlement, and the option of legal departure. The campaign started on state-run Viet Nam Radio and continued on national television. Newspapers, the BBC and the Voice of Armenia (VOA) were also involved.

3. Two differences distinguish the Mass Information Campaign in Viet Nam from previous mass information activities carried out during emergencies or in camps: first, the inclusion of such a campaign in a major humanitarian strategy, combined with the recognition that the dissemination of information to persons of UNHCR's concern could play a critical role; secondly, the use of a variety of vectors in a complex information campaign to transmit simple messages about a single theme.

4. After the experience in Viet Nam, mass information activities were used on several occasions in similar ways as one component of a strategy, using a relatively complex information framework to convey simple messages about a single theme. In the Cambodian repatriation, for example, starting in April 1992, UNHCR arranged to broadcast on the VOA and the Voice of Viet Nam a message recorded by Prince Sihanouk calling for refugees to return within the framework of UNHCR repatriation programmes. As the repatriation programme picked up, practical information was delivered over and above the messages meant to persuade the population to go back home.

5. During the same year, UNHCR developed preventive mass information activities in Albania, as a response to the irregular exodus of Albanians towards Italy. This campaign was run jointly with International Organisation for Migration (IOM). It was developed with the same general dissuasive objective and simple messages as the Viet Nam campaign, but a new emphasis was placed on interactive communication with the audience, through a programme style in which issues were treated as answers to questions sent in by letters. This format was to be widely used in subsequent campaigns.

6. By 1994 and 1995, when mass information strategies were applied to the major humanitarian crises in the former Yugoslavia and the Great Lakes Region of Africa, a Mass Information Unit (MIU) had been established at Headquarters and work proceeded in an increasingly systematic manner. Although donor support was forthcoming mass information activities were regarded with some scepticism within UNHCR. A need was felt for guidelines specifying under what conditions such campaigns should be envisaged, and what results they could be expected to produce. If mass information were to be accepted within UNHCR as an effective strategic tool, a clearer understanding of its objectives, methodology, criteria for evaluation, and the staff expertise required to implement it would be required.

7. A review of the use of mass information in UNHCR was therefore undertaken at the request of the High Commissioner. Key documents prepared in connection with communication and mass information campaigns were reviewed, in-depth interviews were conducted with staff in the field and at Headquarters, and extensive discussions were held with government

representatives, international organisations and NGOs.

8. A number of conclusions and recommendations for future action were reached on the basis of the information collected and analysed during the survey. Case Studies concerning four UNHCR mass information campaigns (in Albania, the Russian Federation, Sierra Leone and the Great Lakes region of Africa) provide detailed information in support of these conclusions.

9. The review was prepared by Constantin Sokoloff and Walter Irvine, Inspection and Evaluation Service (IES), with research assistance by Cécile Lapière, IES. George Gordon-Lennox, a former UNHCR staff member finalised the report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

10. Mass information campaigns have been a regular feature of certain major UNHCR operations for almost a decade, particularly when policy objectives of preventing massive exodus or promoting mass return fit the broader strategic humanitarian goals of the Office and the international community.

11. Four major campaigns – in Viet Nam, Albania, the Russian Federation and the Great Lakes region of Africa – have been launched since 1989. Mass communication techniques have also been used during repatriation to Cambodia, and in a smaller way in several other situations. A campaign has been designed to promote repatriation to Sierra Leone, but it had to be abandoned.

12. It would seem, however, that mass information has not always been fully understood nor its usefulness appreciated by UNHCR programme managers. Campaigns have been run almost single-handedly by a small "Mass Information Unit", and may not always have been sufficiently well co-ordinated with those responsible for operations in the countries targeted. Inversely, field offices have sometimes effectively used the same techniques, but without reference to the MIU. There is a need for guidelines and training, as well as clarification of where this activity fits into organisational structures.

13. Although information dissemination has always been part and parcel of assistance operations, mass communication through the media aimed at influencing the opinions and behaviour of a target population was first used by UNHCR in Viet Nam to try to convince people not to leave the country in fragile boats. The campaign, with a simple but compelling message ("think twice before putting out to sea"), was launched in the CPA framework as a "soft" alternative to the harsh deterrent methods put in place by certain first asylum countries.

14. Although UNHCR's campaign was criticised in some quarters as an attempt to restrict people's freedom of choice to leave their country, it is believed to have had a positive influence, both in stemming the exodus and in paving the way for return of those asylum-seekers for whom there was no other viable option.

15. In Albania, where mass communication was again used by UNHCR (jointly with IOM) to try to stop a massive exodus, it was clear almost from the outset that refugee status was not an issue – hopeless people were leaving in search of an illusory better life. UNHCR's involvement was therefore based on broader strategic concerns shared with a number of other actors. In seeking to evaluate its impact, it is therefore worth remembering that the campaign was organised in the framework of parallel efforts aimed at bringing Albania out of isolation and restoring confidence through a wide variety of economic assistance and other humanitarian and social measures, developed by concerned European and other governments and international organisations.

16. The Albania campaign, launched in 1992, was relatively inexpensive, and was fully financed by special contributions from several donor countries. It was based on regular radio programmes with a question and answer format on emigration-related issues, and also included a call-in TV round-table featuring prominent personalities, including foreign ambassadors. The organisers received a constant flow of letters, and although relatively small in volume, this correspondence encouraged them to continue.

17. A similar if more sophisticated and multi-faceted campaign was launched in 1994 by the UNHCR Mass Information Unit in the Russian Federation. The Soviet Union had collapsed and borders were opening. Western countries feared mass population movements. In addition, asylum-seekers from the Middle East, Africa and Asia were trying in increasingly large numbers to transit through Russia towards Western Europe. Although the Russian Federation had adhered to the international refugee instruments, their principles were rarely understood and

implementation remained problematic.

18. Through regular programmes on Russian radio and a series of television documentaries, UNHCR sought both to discourage irregular emigration and, on a longer-term basis, develop awareness of human rights, refugee issues and protection principles. Interest in the campaign, which had the support of powerful, government-supported media, was reportedly widespread. The programmes, initially funded by several interested governments, had to be dropped, however, because of lack of continued funding and changing priorities in the MIU. It is therefore suggested that when such a campaign with longer-term implications is envisaged, it may be wise to involve other actors with independent means of financing at the outset.

19. In the Great Lakes Region of Africa, mass communication was used to try to convince Rwandan refugees to return home, despite a chaotic situation in which security guarantees were sometimes lacking. This called for a delicate balance between protection principles and the pressures of political realities. A radio network was created by UNHCR with the help of NGOs (one of which is supported by the Swiss Government) and state radio stations. The campaign also made effective use of video tapes recorded in Rwanda, shown in public meetings in the refugee camps.

20. It is debatable whether the Great Lakes campaign achieved its primary objective, given that the vast majority of refugees who returned were compelled to do so by events in the countries of asylum, notably in Eastern Zaire. It is therefore difficult to judge whether the more than US\$ one million costs of the campaign proved cost-effective. The campaign clearly did contribute, however, to countering the harmful propaganda disseminated by powerful, extremist-controlled radio transmitters.

21. Another campaign, designed to promote repatriation to Sierra Leone, had to be aborted because of changed circumstances in the country of origin of the refugees. The campaign was to be implemented by an NGO with broadcasting capacity and experience, but what type of message would be used and how UNHCR would control content and quality were not evident from project proposals.

22. A number of operational principles have emerged in these campaigns which could serve as a basis for future guidelines. These include establishing a dialogue with the target audience; using mutually-reinforcing communication techniques to disseminate very simple messages; using personal refugee or returnee experiences, and negative as well as positive information in order to enhance credibility; and adapting messages to rapidly-changing circumstances. They also underline the importance of involving staff with in-depth knowledge and experience of UNHCR's mandate and principles. Another indispensable element is maintaining UNHCR's control over content when campaigns are run with other partners, while at the same time recognising the obvious need for the full co-operation of the authorities in the target country or countries.

23. Using mass communication techniques to achieve specific operational and strategic objectives may either complement or overlap with practical assistance-related information, awareness-building and general public information activities. Generally speaking, similar expertise is required.

24. The limitations inherent in any information activity make it difficult to gauge success or failure, nonetheless, it is evident that assessments of the impact of these campaigns has tended to be somewhat subjective and lacking in objective supporting data. Although sophisticated audience survey and polling methods are costly, and probably beyond the reach of a humanitarian organisation, simple diagnostic techniques involving samplings of the target audience exist which can be used both for message testing and for relatively reliable impact evaluation. Up until now this has not been done systematically. It is evident that in the future impact-assessment should be built into project-design at the outset, rather than waiting until the end of a project in order to evaluate results.

25. There is also a clear need, both in terms of content and timing, for close liaison with those responsible for overall policy decisions in the fields of protection and operations management. Indeed, if mass communication can be a powerful tool in support of strategic objectives, its use can be expensive and may well not be appropriate in all situations.

26. Before launching a mass communication campaign, therefore, the protection and operational concerns, the ethical considerations and political pitfalls, as well as the costs must all be very carefully weighed. Such an analysis could, in many instances, lead to the conclusion

that unless there is a fairly strong built-in guarantee of success, it might be wise not to launch into mass communication activities particularly when objectives and messages are not clear and situations are volatile.

II. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS AND OPERATIONAL PRINCIPLES

General

27. To properly reflect the interactive nature of UNHCR's use of communication techniques in favour of persons of its concern, the terminology could be changed from "mass information" to "mass communication activities". These should be distinguished from operational assistance information activities and awareness-building information activities.

28. Mass communication and public information share many of the same tools, and mass information techniques are used in certain aspects of public information, such as awareness building. An option which should therefore be given serious consideration would be to integrate all mass information activities in a separate Mass Communication Unit, either within Public Information, or in DOS but functioning in very close liaison with PI, as well as with the bureaux and desks concerned.

29. The establishment at UNHCR Headquarters of a mass communication specialist post to head the proposed Mass Communication Unit should also be seriously considered.

30. A balance should be sought in each mass communication campaign between programme expediency, protection principles and the setting up of fluid communication exchanges between UNHCR and beneficiaries. Ensuring that such a balance is reached could be one central function of the senior mass communication officer, acting in close co-ordination with bureau staff and mass communication/mass information personnel in the field.

31. In order to integrate mass communication into the mainstream of UNHCR activities, country-level or regional seminars should be organised and guidelines for mass communication programme design and development issued and disseminated through the bureaux and the field offices. This could be another function of the senior mass communication officer.

32. To mainstream mass communication does not mean communication campaigns are appropriate in all situations. Guidelines should emphasise that a careful initial diagnosis is required at the strategy-design stage to determine whether a communication campaign should be launched at all, and to what extent it should incorporate assistance information and awareness-building elements.

33. Mass communication requires special expertise in applied communication science, including in the field of assessment, planning and evaluation. Using outside expertise provided by specialised entities, especially at field level, should be considered, in order to complete the inputs of UNHCR staff, to ensure better programme delivery, and to provide opportunities for staff to benefit from the experience of communication professionals.

Operational principles

34. **Establish a dialogue:** Communication campaigns seek to establish a dialogue with a target population in order to influence its opinions about a given issue, and to encourage it to follow a certain course of action. The most effective dialogue is on a person-to-person basis with the target audience, giving people the opportunity to obtain responses to questions through letters (to radio or TV stations or the press), telephone calls (to radio or television programmes) or directly, during public meetings.

35. **Inform and educate:** Communication campaigns are not intended to instruct people on what to do or not to do, but rather to inform/educate them, so that they can reach an independent conclusion on the course of action being recommended (e.g. go back home; think twice before leaving your country).

36. **Messages must be limited and simple:** Whatever the number of stages in a communication campaign, the messages conveyed should be simply expressed, clearly prioritised and limited in number. Use of mutually reinforcing media (such as video tapes supporting radio broadcasts, or explanations in public meetings) will enhance impact.

37. **Campaigns must be specific and flexible:** Communication campaigns must be tailor-made, situation- and population-specific, and flexible enough to be adapted to continually evolving circumstances. Before being finalised, messages should therefore be tested with typical members of the target population, and reactions discussed and analysed. Objectives may need

to be redefined if, to take one example, repatriation must be delayed due to negative developments in the country of origin.

38. Credibility is all-important: The credibility of the information delivered should be maximised by (a) including examples of personal experiences of members of the target audience (e.g. letters, recordings of a telephone call, audio-visual material); (b) providing a balanced view, including information about negative situations and difficulties, and avoiding one-sided, over-positive or over-negative descriptions.

39. Combining UNHCR principles, in-depth local knowledge and technical expertise: Those responsible for the development and dissemination of communication campaigns must combine: (a) detailed knowledge of UNHCR institutional principles; (b) in-depth understanding of the cultural parameters of the targeted population, of its recent history, and of the opinions of its various sub-groups regarding the main objective of the campaign; (c) technical competence in the communications field.

40. Mass communication may not always be appropriate: Although the option to include a communication campaign should be considered each time a programme is developed, a campaign should not automatically be incorporated into each and every programme.

III. MASS COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

41. There is no clearly-defined conceptual framework delineating the scope of what have up until now been known as "mass information" activities within UNHCR. Since the first such experience in Viet Nam, it has always been understood that mass communication campaigns are aimed at influencing the attitude and behaviour of selected target populations. In the case of Viet Nam, UNHCR focused on dissuading massive exodus by sea. A few years later, during the Cambodia repatriation, mass communication activities were mostly aimed at disseminating practical information to respond to the needs of the returning population. In the Albanian campaign, messages aimed at dissuading the population from leaving their home country were supplemented by messages intended to educate the population at large on refugee and human rights issues and concepts. The latter objective was also an important feature of the campaign undertaken in the Russian Federation.

42. A distinction can be made among three categories of information activities carried out in relation to persons actually or potentially of concern to UNHCR (as opposed to general Public Information activities):

assistance information activities, whose primary objective is to provide factual information to a given population (often refugees in camps) about available assistance and other practical aspects of their daily lives, including law and order. Such campaigns are a standard aspect of UNHCR assistance delivery.

awareness building activities, which seek to educate the population at large, including populations actually or potentially of UNHCR's concern, on concepts related to refugee and humanitarian issues. Such campaigns are a frequent aspect of UNHCR protection or public information activities. They are essentially didactic.

communication activities, which seek to establish a dialogue with populations actually or potentially of UNHCR's concern, in order to convince them to follow a given course of action (or to dissuade them from making potentially dangerous or hopeless decisions). Such campaigns have occasionally been used in UNHCR's operations, as one component of an overall strategy, such as those aimed at promoting voluntary repatriation or dissuading a population from leaving their home country.

43. In practice, the three types of campaigns can be used independently or in different combinations. The terms "mass" and "campaign" are used when the scale of the activities and number of persons reached are large. The following table illustrates the different types of mass information/communication activities that have been used by UNHCR.

Country	Focus Objectives	Pop. targeted	Total budget US\$	Media/Tools	Duration
RBE		Albanians in Albania and in		Weekly 45min radio programme	

Albania	Prevent Mass Departure from Albania	Western Europe (Balkans)	500,000	Weekly 10' TV programme Press HCR/IOM	
Albania	Prevent Mass departure	Albanians in Albania		Radio/TV programmes/ICMPD TV documentary series on refugees in Russia (as in 1995). Two radio programmes on information/questions on refugee-related issues Education materials for students and school teachers.	1997
Russia	Tolerance towards refugees.	Moscovites	(Danish Trust fund)	Information campaign on bill boards in the Moscow subway.	Planned for 1998
Russia	Tolerance towards refugees.	Moscovites	Within the a/m budget		1997
FORMER YUGOSLAVIA					
Bosnia	Advise women concerning their role in the reconstruction phase.	Mass audience of Bosnian women		Radio Zena from Search for Common ground NGO/Radio Programme" A common ground for Women" Stabilisation Force (SFOR) Television+ Office of the High Representative (OHR) TV+UNHCR programme on Radio Free Europe. Mini-documentaries about return: Gradski Radio through Radio Vukovar and Radio UNTAES. Interviews – Europe/UNHCR Zagreb/in cooperation with (CE/LDE)the Council of Europe/Local Democracy Embassy in Vukovar	On-going
Bosnia	Information and reconciliation	Bosnian refugees			
Croatia	Peaceful Reintegration, Conditions upon return.	Population living in the UNTAES region and population in the area before the war 1991, in particular Serbian IDPs Eastern Slavonia	15,000 25,000		
Serbia	Refugees are kept informed on developments in the former Yugoslavia and on their rights	Refugees and local communities in Belgrade area and municipalities where the radio broadcasts.		Serbia B92 and other local radios in the former Yugoslavia.	On-going
GREAT LAKES					
Congo	Volrep Mutual understanding,	Total refugee population (2,037,846)	25,000	Radio MI campaign in Kisangani/Radio Amani.	1997

Rwanda	non-violence, respect and knowledge of UNHCR's mandate and activities, so that confidence between the various sections of society can be gradually rebuilt	Entire Rwandan, 1,3 million recent returnees from Burundi, Uganda and Tanzania	270,000	Radio BBC Programme 15' to 30'	1998
CEWA					
Liberia/Sierra Leone	Assist in reintegration. Inform on conditions at home.	Sierra-Leonean refugees in Monrovia	22,000	Radio Fondation Hironnelle Project/Radio Star in Monrovia	97-98
	Assist volrep and reintegration	Liberian refugees in Guinea and Ivory Coast	58,000	Radio SCG project (Talking drums Studio in Monrovia).	97-98
North-western Somalia	Volrep and conditions of return. Advocate peace-building.	Refugees in Hargeisa.	60,000	HCR/Radio Hargeisa/ BBC Somali Service	Projected for 98
CASWANAME					
CIS	Inter-ethnic understanding. Promotion of international instruments and activities.	Uzbek and Kirgiz.	38,000	Radio programme in Uzbek and Kyrgyz Information centre in Universities of Bishkek and Tbilisi.	Project
Yemen	Prevention of illegal departures	Somali refugees	80,000	Radio Campaign for Somali Asylum seekers /BBC Somalia Monthly radio programme of radio messages broadcast through Radio Laayoune and Radio Polisario	1995-1997
Western Sahara	Building confidence and establishing bridges between Communities. Better understanding of the UN/UNHCR.	Refugee population of Tindouf refugee camp and the population of Western Sahara	50,000	Bi-weekly programme with answers/questions	Projected 1998
Northern Iraq	Prevent Mass departure from Northern Iraq	Kurdish populations willing to migrate to Turkey and Europe	25,000	12 video programmes broadcast through N.Iraqi TV stations	on-going
Asia-Pacific					
Viet Nam	Discourage illegal departure of individuals with no refugee claim to Hong Kong and Asian countries of first asylum. To inform potential returnees about conditions in countries of origin. Information about the role of UNHCR in repatriation/arrangement of transport. Assistance upon return.	All Vietnamese		Radio and TV+ Newspapers in countries of origin and of asylum.	1991-1992
Cambodia		280,000 refugees		Leaflets, videos, and information sessions in the camps.	1991-1992

IV. MASS COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES: A STRATEGIC APPROACH

Opinion-forming: a common denominator in mass communication campaigns

44. All strategy-related mass communication campaigns, whether geared to prevent movement from the country or village of origin, or to encourage repatriation, have one element in

common: they seek to influence the target population's *opinion* of a given situation, compared to the one in which it finds itself, so as to increase the likelihood that people will either decide to remain where they are, or to go elsewhere, as the case may be. Such opinions will be formed through weighing of different messages, some of which may be objective while others are distorted, until they are either rejected or accorded the stamp of credibility.

45. Through mass communication campaigns, opinions can be influenced by disseminating a well-targeted, coherent package of objective, neutral and relevant information, which hopefully will counteract the harmful effects of rumours based on distorted or biased data. Furthermore, dialogue between the givers and receivers of the information will maximise the impact of such a campaign. Dialogue can be particularly effective in structured encounters in which specialised UNHCR staff discuss the information with the targeted group. The staff concerned should be persons who combine in-depth knowledge of the targeted population's cultural parameters, its recent history, and a clear understanding of UNHCR policies and principles. This is more feasible in camps, for example pending repatriation (e.g. discussion groups organised by "UNHCR animators" in the Goma camps of Eastern Zaire, see Case Study), but dialogue can also be a feature of campaigns aimed at discouraging departure (e.g. radio programmes broadcast during the campaigns in Albania and the Russian Federation, where listeners send letters to the radio station and listen to the answers during broadcasts; see Case Studies).

Educational aspects of mass communication campaigns

46. Many of the activities implemented to date under the heading of mass communication have had important educational components. For example, informing populations about their rights to travel, immigrate, seek asylum, etc. is also educating them as responsible citizens, free to choose among available options. Similarly, promoting inter-ethnic or other forms of social tolerance is an endeavour in social and civil education. In fact, outside formal or academic frameworks, the concept of education has been widely used to emphasise the quality, relevance and durability of information processes targeted at various groups. Health or sanitation education is basically an information-sharing process, but it has been labelled education in order to stress the particular importance of health-related information, and the fact that it needs to be remembered and applied whenever necessary.

47. On the other hand, the UNHCR Mass Information Unit (MIU) has described as 'education' numerous activities that traditionally were undertaken under the heading of information. In recent times, the Unit has explored and increasingly focused on the use of educational tools to address the problems of social and inter-ethnic differences, fragmentation and tolerance, conflict and reconciliation. Under the heading of 'entertainment/education', television or radio drama series carrying a certain number of messages are broadcast, the assumption being that 'soap operas' are exceptionally well received by all populations.

48. There are certain limitations, however, to entertainment/education programmes. First, to successfully reach beyond pure entertainment, such programmes must perfectly connect with the state of mind of the audiences. This requires a thorough knowledge of the local culture and values, and also a dynamic perception of the key issues in the targeted society. Consequently, preparatory diagnosis of the potential audiences is extremely complex, possibly costly and time-consuming. Second, entertainment/education requires long-term, large-scale involvement, as it is improbable that a short series will have a lasting impact. Third, entertainment/education or dramas do not necessarily effectively support factual information.

49. While entertainment/education is therefore of undoubted value in long-term efforts to change people's attitudes and behaviour, it is less obvious in the operational contexts that are generally faced by UNHCR. As with most reintegration and rehabilitation issues, while UNHCR may be the first to identify a need for such activities, it should probably at a fairly early stage seek other actors to actually respond to this need with long-term commitments.

Mass communication and practical information

50. Whether in complex emergencies or in care and maintenance situations, the need of refugees for information is often as vital as the access to other tangible forms of assistance. Reliable and adequate information flows to refugee populations are in fact indispensable tools, both for ensuring refugee access to assistance and for aid management.

51. Caution is needed, however, with respect to the potentially ambiguous and sensitive nature of practical information. When delivered through mass communication methods, such

information can be interpreted by the beneficiaries as efforts from some authority to pressure them into undesirable situations. For example, information on availability and location of resources can be mistaken by refugees for manipulation by those from whom they fled. They may fear caseload consolidation or resent what they see as control over their movements. Indeed, mass-delivered practical information can be easily manipulated to attain a wide range of both small and more important political ends. This has proven to be the case in the Great Lakes Region and in Former Yugoslavia.

52. Despite the apparent simplicity of assistance-related information, therefore, much care should be given to the formulation of practical messages. Relief teams such as those despatched by EPRS should be reminded of the potency of mass communication at the outset of a humanitarian emergency and whenever possible communication expertise as well as hardware should be made available in the field.

Prevention and mass communication

53. In the context of the High Commissioner's three-pronged strategy of prevention, preparedness and solutions, the concept of prevention applies to a broad range of issues which have been recently examined in detail by in-house expertise. In this report, however, use of the term "prevention" is limited to activities aiming at: preventing social or ethnic conflict liable to destabilise societal structures and provoke population displacement; preventing international conflicts which also generate displacement; preventing and containing ongoing displacement; and preventing secondary social conflicts and displacement in the context of asylum or repatriation situations.

54. It is debatable whether even the most comprehensive strategies, necessitating important political and economic inputs, can arrest processes of polarisation and conflict leading to massive displacement. Of necessity, any UNHCR strategy aimed at deflecting conflict and reducing the possibility of displacement through a mass communication campaign would in any event have to be closely co-ordinated with other actors, both national and international, as one component of a joint strategy.

55. There are several prerequisites if information or communication campaigns are to prove relevant and successful as tools of prevention. First, the need for communication activities must be determined as soon as a conflictual situation is foreseen. The value of prevention in any form rests primarily on the timeliness with which it can be translated into operational action. As a conflict emerges, its rationale and the positions of the parties should be analysed. The anticipated reaction of the population to these issues and their behavioural consequences should be assessed. The need for and nature of preventive messages should be determined and their expected effects anticipated. Only a systematic and early approach to the information needs in a developing crisis can ensure a satisfactory impact.

56. Every society has its own mass information and communication processes, and it is only through understanding and making use of local communication channels and networks that maximal outreach and impact of prevention messages can be guaranteed. In a situation where conflict is brewing, on the other hand, imported messages may contribute to general distrust, fear of manipulation and greater reliance on often dangerous rumours.

Negative and positive messages

57. Mass communication with persons of concern to the High Commissioner aims at empowering populations with the knowledge which will permit them to make informed, conscious and hopefully correct decisions that may be crucial in their lives. Populations at risk such as refugees may be desperate to find ways to improve their circumstances. As a result, they may be especially vulnerable to coercion, manipulation and propaganda. Misinformation, rumours, hate campaigns and false hopes that may be inspired by involved parties during conflict and post-conflict humanitarian crises are some of the factors which can be addressed by UNHCR's mass communication programmes.

58. Certain types of mass communication messages contain negative judgements about given situations, as when information is disseminated with the aim of discouraging people from taking actions they may feel will improve their lives. Such information is bound to emphasise the negative aspects of a certain course of action – for instance leaving one's country on fragile boats. There is an ethical dimension in designing and disseminating such messages which cannot be overlooked.

59. In the case of mass information programmes which aim at preventing irregular movements,

it may be argued (and various NGOs have done so) that use of the influence carried by such information messages may run counter to the people's basic rights to freedom of movement or to asylum.

60. During the mass information campaign in Viet Nam, UNHCR sought to convey messages about negative conditions to people who showed a high degree of willingness to leave their country and probably become asylum-seekers, i.e. persons of concern to the High Commissioner. Perhaps for the first time in its history, UNHCR operated the campaign in the country of origin. Its aim was to provide potential asylum-seekers with objective information on the conditions awaiting them in the course of and after their flight. The conditions were so bad and the chances of securing asylum so slim that the message was in effect negative and could only encourage people to remain in their country of origin.

61. Further developments in Viet Nam and the fate of many boat people tend to support the view that remaining in the country was for the great majority a better choice than flight. Nevertheless the decision to develop a mass information campaign conveying negative messages with respect to asylum required the exercise of great moral responsibility. Such decisions can only be taken after thorough study of all the aspects of any given developing situation. In any case it is clear that if the success of the Viet Nam mass information campaign is to be matched in future operations, most serious consideration must be given to the ethical significance of interfering with people's pursuit of what they perceive to be their own good.

62. Mass communication activities are more likely to have a positive impact at the point when a crisis develops and displacement is underway. Mass communication can then aim at preventing further chaos by assisting populations to relocate, as well as by identifying and indicating access to vital resources such as shelter, food and health care. Mass communication programmes can also be instrumental in preventing the problems associated with asylum by informing refugees of their rights and duties, as well as opportunities for local settlement. Such programmes can also be targeted at the local communities, soliciting their acceptance of refugees and promoting tolerance.

63. Return to country or village of origin and reintegration are other areas where mass communication activities may have a role in preventing rejection and secondary displacement. Here again, messages promoting the acceptance of returnees and tolerance of those who may have been earlier forced out of their homes can influence the success of reintegration programmes.

64. Whatever the objective, however, it must be stressed that mass communication activities are a support to strategies, not a substitute for them. Their influence is as strong as the appeal of the programme they are meant to sustain. It is in this spirit that the "Operational principles for communication campaigns" included in the Recommendations of this review are presented.

Impact assessment and evaluation

65. It is difficult to evaluate the impact of mass communication activities. In most instances it will probably not be possible to ascertain the role of communication campaign messages in a person's decision not to leave his or her country. It may be even more difficult to measure impact accurately in such areas as inter-ethnic tolerance. The costs involved in the use of sophisticated polling and surveying methodologies would probably be prohibitive. Given the relatively modest budgets of mass communication projects, it would not be viable to make full evaluation the norm. On the other hand, to merely rely on a vague sense that mass information has to be a good thing whenever it is used is clearly inadequate.

66. It would therefore seem that a radically different approach to evaluation of mass communication projects is required, compared with the traditional mid- and end-project monitoring reporting prevailing in other assistance activities. Whereas for conventional projects, impact can only be fully assessed upon completion, the probable impact of mass communication activities can be projected at the time the campaign is being designed. This approach could be called impact anticipation: testing at the outset the campaign's ability to influence opinion, to counter misinformation, to create a climate conducive to independent thinking, to convince.

67. A relatively inexpensive technique consists of selecting a small representative sample of the target population and analysing its responses to the information messages to be delivered. This method, which comes under the general category of qualitative audience research, can be refined through various options. For example, the sample group could be re-tested at project

end and these results compared with the initial testing. The exercise could be supplemented by testing a second group which has been receiving the information normally and making a comparative analysis.

68. Audience research literature is particularly abundant and is regularly updated by various think-tanks as well as specialist practitioners like the BBC and other major broadcasting organisations. It contains numerous examples of methods which also can be easily adapted and applied to the specificities of UNHCR mass communication activities. What is important is to recognise that impact assessment and anticipation or evaluation in whichever form applicable must be an essential part of project design.

V. ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES: BRINGING MASS COMMUNICATION INTO THE MAINSTREAM OF UNHCR OPERATIONS

Mass communication and operations: bridging the gap

69. While there is clearly an awareness within UNHCR of the potential usefulness of mass communication programmes, there remain some misunderstandings as to how the concept could be applied to operations. Some bureaux may be more aware than others of the use that can be made of mass communication activities. Some bureaux have also launched similar activities on their own initiative, as components of their operations, without recognising them as such. Irrespective of the degree of success that may have been achieved in such situations, co-ordination with the Mass Information Unit would have been important for the sake of building experience in that field.

70. Mass communication activities need to be placed in the mainstream of UNHCR operations while keeping an open channel to a central reservoir of communication expertise. The benefits of communication campaigns seem clear. What is now required is to integrate the mass communication option into standard planning procedures.

71. Drawing up guidelines or a handbook on mass communication could be a way of promoting this approach. Training, for example in the form of regional workshops on mass communication and operations, should also be considered.

72. Another important organisational issue concerns the role and location of a Mass Communication Unit. Until recently, a limited range of mass information activities had been almost single-handedly managed by a senior officer. The focus of the programmes had been primarily on affecting the behaviour of target groups, particularly with regard to potential outflows or irregular movements. Programmes were designed and agreements with Governments and other implementing partners directly negotiated by this staff-member. Later a Mass Information Unit was established.

73. In the meantime, a number of mass communication/information activities had also been initiated at field level and did not benefit from the support of the already overworked Unit. In Tajikistan, in Iran, critical communication/information activities were designed and implemented by field staff. In other offices, activities were regularly undertaken, albeit not systematically, which fit in the grey zone where awareness-building, public information and mass information tend to overlap. Generally, senior bureau staff have reported limited reliance upon or even interaction with the Mass Information Unit. In some instances, bureaux and field offices have felt that the Unit did not meet their operational expectations.

74. Some field staff expressed suspicion of a process over which they felt they had little control. The Mass Information Unit appeared to act independently on the authority of the LOIs it held and direct negotiations were conducted between the Unit, governments and implementing partners. In the case of mass information activities in Russia, for example, most of the work was prepared in Geneva and the office in Moscow had the impression of serving merely as a relay.

75. Furthermore, lack of resources and selective project targeting may have also contributed to create a gap between the Unit's conception of mass communication/ information objectives and the programmes and expectations of bureaux and field offices. It is unlikely that this gap can be closed as long as the Unit continues to be perceived as favouring educational activities over practical operational communication. A policy decision is needed to assign a realistic range of activities to the Unit.

Strengthening the Unit and/or refining its tasks

76. If all aspects of refugee situations requiring mass communication are to be fully addressed,

the current capacity of the Unit may not be sufficient. One option would be to narrow down the scope of mass communication activities and assign to the Unit full involvement in the development of a specific type of project. Another option would be to give the Unit a purely advisory function. Such a function would tend to shift the initiative to the bureaux, and hence contribute to putting mass communication in the mainstream.

77. Under the latter option, the unit could consist of a communication specialist acting as a focal point, advisor and co-ordinator for mass communication issues, perhaps located in Public Information. It would be essential that such a mass communication advisor or specialist possess expert knowledge of communication development and research techniques and methodologies. Familiarity with audience research methods, assessment and polling techniques would be indispensable aids to develop a systematic and rational approach to mass communication. Moreover, such an expert should be able to organise the farming-out of mass communication activities whenever possible. Experience has shown that neither a central unit nor field offices ever have enough resources to handle effectively a large volume of mass information activities. Use of outside resources would therefore seem to be the best solution. It would require, however, an ability on the part of UNHCR to craft complex projects, including control and monitoring mechanisms.

Staffing issues

78. Special expertise is required by persons responsible for designing, launching and monitoring the implementation of communication campaigns. These skills must be directly related to the dynamic nature of such campaigns, and call for technical competence in the communications field. Messages must be continually adapted to evolving conditions and changing opinions of the targeted population. This continual renovation calls for ongoing assessment and evaluation of impact of the campaign.

79. In addition, those responsible need to have a detailed knowledge of UNHCR institutional principles, as well as an in-depth understanding of the cultural parameters of the targeted population, its recent history and the opinions of its various sub-groups regarding the strategy-related, main objective of the proposed campaign.

80. It is recommended that at the field level, communication campaigns be designed, implemented, and assessed by a team, ideally headed by a specialised officer (e.g. the PI officer) working in co-ordination with programme and protection staff and whatever outside resource is considered necessary. In the absence of a public information officer, an appropriate alternative should be assigned to the task by the head of office.

81. In recognition of the uniqueness of mass communication activities (as UNHCR information activities linked to the strategies of specific operations, and as information activities concerned with dialogue with actual or potential UNHCR beneficiaries), the establishment of a mass communication specialist post should be seriously considered. The main functions of the post (which could be located within Public Information) could be the following:

- a) To monitor the implementation of mass communication campaigns in close co-ordination with appropriate bureau staff. More specifically, to ensure consistency among communication campaigns in respect of the principles that underlie them, and to ensure that all communication campaigns reach a balance between protection principles, programme expediency and the setting up of a transparent communication exchange with beneficiaries. In case of specially sensitive operations, the officer could carry out the appropriate consultations with the bureaux, the Protection Division and, if necessary, the Executive Office.
- b) To promote the integration of mass information activities into the mainstream of UNHCR activities, by organising country-level or regional seminars to acquaint field staff with the theoretical and operational issues concerned, and hear their views.
- c) To organise training seminars for public information (and/or other) staff in the field to equip them to set up and lead mass communication teams made up of UNHCR and outside human resources.
- d) To develop minimum standards and guidelines for mass communication programme design and development, and to disseminate them through the bureaux and field offices. (See proposed operational principles, section II).
- e) To ensure co-ordination between communication campaigns and public information activities at the field level, so that the messages of communication campaigns are consistent

with those delivered by public information and mutually reinforce each other.

f) To ensure the technical input of technical public information staff in order to maintain minimal standards of quality.

VI. CASE STUDIES: AN OVERVIEW

82. Following the pioneering campaign undertaken in Viet Nam in the framework of the CPA, which is referred to in some detail in the main body of this review, the four Case Studies below are based on information drawn by the authors from numerous reports and other relevant documents related to UNHCR's mass information activities to date.

83. The projects described, all of which were designed and wholly or partially implemented by the Mass Information Unit at Headquarters, share a number of common features. At the same time, each has its own specific characteristics and illustrates in different ways the general observations, conclusions, recommendations and operational principles included in this report.

84. The campaigns are presented in chronological order (with some overlapping), but they may also be divided into two types: the first two in Albania and the Russian Federation were, like the campaign in Viet Nam, principally aimed at stemming and preventing an exodus of emigrants/asylum-seekers, with education and awareness-building as secondary objectives. The campaigns in the Great Lakes region of Africa and Sierra Leone, on the other hand, were largely focused on promoting voluntary repatriation (in the case of Sierra Leone, changed circumstances forced suspension of this aspect of the campaign).

85. As in Viet Nam, the mass information campaigns in Albania and Russia were undertaken in the context of broader strategic efforts on the part of the international community (more particularly on the part of Western, industrial societies) to prevent massive population movements, while at the same time stimulating economic development and the respect of human rights in the countries concerned. These issues were not necessarily directly linked to the Mandate of UNHCR, although they fit well with the concerns of the High Commissioner regarding prevention.

86. In the Great Lakes, on the other hand, the overriding concern was to solve through repatriation a massive refugee problem which was destabilising a whole region, even though the situation in the country of origin of the refugees was far from ideal and the risks remained considerable. Potential returnees had to be reassured, and propaganda countered with objective information illustrating the positive advantages of return. In Sierra Leone, repatriation seemed an attractive option and the mass information campaign was well-designed as regarded communication networks and coverage, but had to be aborted when the situation changed dramatically for the worse and the message itself was no longer relevant.

87. Among the features common to all four, the most striking is that radio broadcasting remains by far the most effective vector for mass communication. Television (or video presentations) comes a distant but important second, strongly reinforcing the message through images and in certain situations, such as the Great Lakes, adding greatly to credibility. Under the principle of mutually reinforcing means of communication, public meetings conducted by UNHCR officials (first used in Viet Nam) were clearly effective in the Great Lakes.

88. Dialogue between broadcasters and listeners or viewers also proved effective in both Albania and Russia, particularly when it was "live". Concrete personal experiences relayed through mass communications (as in Albania and the Great Lakes) also clearly have more impact than more abstract notions, or general observations, no matter how objective and detailed they may be.

89. It is also clear from the three concluded campaigns, however, that insufficient attention has been paid to evaluating not only response and impact, but also end results. People's attitudes may have been affected to a certain degree by what they have seen or heard, but in all three cases, because of lack of follow-up with a sampling of the target audience, it was not possible to judge whether the campaign messages were actually determinant in the decisions they may or may not have taken. In the case of Albania, statistics could have been put to better use to gauge impact.

90. The need for very flexible formats making it possible to adapt messages to changed circumstances is obviously illustrated in Sierra Leone, and also in the Great Lakes. The importance of UNHCR being in full control of content when NGO or national broadcasting partners are involved is also illustrated in these two studies.

91. The difficulty of reconciling protection principles and concerns with political considerations affecting peace and stability in a whole region are amply clear from the Case Study on the Great Lakes campaign. Already evident from observations made by NGOs during the Viet Nam campaign, protection and human rights issues obviously must be a key element in designing such campaigns and, as was the case in Sierra Leone, serve as a key indicator in policy decisions as to whether or not to proceed.

92. Finally, the political sensitivities of organising mass communication campaigns penetrating sovereign states cannot be ignored. This is particularly relevant when the objective is promoting repatriation, as is well illustrated with the case of Rwanda, but the campaigns in Albania and Russia also show the need for care in designing mass communication messages.

JOINT IOM/UNHCR MIGRATION INFORMATION PROGRAMME FOR ALBANIA (1992-1994)

I. Background

93. Early in 1991, political developments in Albania and the collapse of the economy resulted in a massive irregular exodus of Albanians, mostly to Italy, but also to Greece and other Western European countries. In June of that year, a UNDP-led Inter-Agency Humanitarian Needs Assessment mission which visited the country came to the conclusion that the irregular departures were not politically motivated, but were directly linked to on-going socio-economic conditions, although they also were a reaction to some 50 years of enforced isolation. Acting on the same assumption, the Italian Government ended the screening of Albanian illegal arrivals in August 1991, and after having received guarantees of non-persecution from the Albanian authorities, implemented a policy of immediate mandatory repatriation.

94. In October 1991, a joint IOM/UNHCR Mission in its turn concluded that "illusion" and misinformation on working and living conditions abroad generated by the foreign media, readily accessible by the population, were major factors behind the exodus. The Mission felt that the irregular departures could be stemmed by providing potential emigrants with information about legal channels of emigration, including visa procedures, possibilities of work abroad, and conditions of asylum. People should also be informed about the consequences of illegal departure: the high probability of deportation, the disadvantages of illegal residence abroad.

95. On the Mission's recommendation, a 24-month joint UNHCR-IOM Migration Information Programme for Albania was launched during the first quarter of 1992. The campaign, which had the full support of President Berisha and the Albanian authorities, was based on the model of the campaign conducted by UNHCR in Viet Nam within the framework of the CPA. The Unit responsible for the programme was operational from mid-April 1992 until programme finalisation in March 1994.

II. The Migration Information Programme

Administrative structure:

96. Project administration was entrusted to IOM and was headed by a UNHCR staff-member operating from UNHCR Headquarters in Geneva and reporting to a Steering Committee, which included two directors from each organisation. Implementation in Albania was to be assured by a "programme correspondent".

Programme parameters: Identification of the target-audience and choice of media

97. The core potential emigrant group was the male population age 20 to 39 (16% of the total population) with some from the 18-19 year old group. In order to ensure maximum programme impact on potential emigrants, however, it was decided to design a programme addressing the society as a whole. This was based on the following assumptions:

that opinion about departure within the potential emigrant group was formed and reinforced in discussion;

that in Albania, discussions within the family, and with the family heads in particular, are determinant in forming the opinion of a young person on a given subject;

that given the existence of a "departure climate" in Albania, opinion is also the result of discussions outside the home.

98. Given the strong oral tradition in Albania, the main campaign communication media was

radio broadcasts, with marginal support by TV and press activities the ratio of radio sets to population was 172 per 1,000 (550,000 radio sets) compared to 83 per 1,000 TV sets (265,000 sets), and 43 per 1,000 newspapers (for a daily newspaper circulation of 135,000).

Geographical coverage and frequency of broadcasts

99. Through the Radio Tirana First Programme, which was transmitted on medium wave and on short wave, the programme covered the whole of Albania, Kosovo, FYR Macedonia, Montenegro, Southern Italy and Northern Greece. The programme thus reached practically every area in the Balkans with a sizeable Albanian population. In addition, through the Short Wave Programme, it covered the Albanian diaspora in the whole of Western Europe. Albanians abroad, especially in Italy and Greece, were targeted because the programme offered information about sponsorship procedures for family reunion from Albania with those living abroad legally.

100. The programme format consisted of a 30-minute listeners' letter-answering segment, broadcast once a fortnight during the first year and weekly in the second year. Between August 1992 and March 1994, a total of 403 letters were received, equal to about 130 letters per million inhabitants. An average of three letters were answered in each radio programme.

101. Letters in Albanian were translated in Tirana and sent by fax to Geneva, where the Mass Information Unit selected the letters and researched the answers, provided by various government sources whenever necessary. The answers were translated and recorded in Albanian in Tirana, and Radio Tirana then produced the programme with alternating music, presentation of the programme (in Italian by the head of MIU with Albanian voice-over), reading of letters and answers (again with Albanian voice-over), etc.

Operational principles:

102. Against the background of 45 years of totalitarianism, during which the radio had been used to coerce or to disseminate propaganda, and on the assumption that international organisations such as IOM and UNHCR had more credibility in Albania than the government, the following basic operational principles were maintained to maximise the programme's credibility:

To follow an educational style of communication

Rather than instructing people not to leave, the programme was aimed at educating them about legal departure formalities, and the risks associated with illegal departure. It was thus hoped that potential emigrants would reach the independent conclusion that illegal departure was not a viable option. This departure-specific information was to be placed within the wider context of efforts underway to improve the disastrous social and economic conditions in Albania, and to alleviate the uncertainty in which a large segment of the population found itself regarding its prospects for the future.

To develop a dialogue with the listeners.

The listeners' letter-answering programme was well suited to this objective. Letters sent by specific individuals did not all concern emigration, they also covered such subjects as temporary work abroad, and family news (including visits and family reunion). At least one letter dealing with emigration-related issues, however, and containing questions allowing the widest coverage of the subject, was included in each broadcast. The programme therefore conveyed the impression that specific personal situations were being addressed, rather than trying to impose information.

In addition, an effort was made to establish and maintain a personal dialogue between the audience and specific, clearly identified IOM or UNHCR staff radio speakers. Thus the image of state propaganda provided by an anonymous bureaucracy was avoided.

To convey experiences of returning Albanians

Rather than telling people there were no work opportunities abroad, the radio speaker would read letters from people who had returned from abroad because they could not find work.

Television used to support the campaign

103. The same principles were maintained when television was used as a support to the campaign. Three 40-minute programmes entitled "Beyond the Dream" were produced by a four-person team who filmed asylum reception centres, interviewed emigrants and asylum seekers, government officials and IOM and UNHCR staff in Germany, Switzerland and Italy. Each of the three programmes was aired twice in May 1993. Broadcast of the series was followed by a two-hour TV round table in Tirana, during which viewers' questions were answered live. The programme was introduced by the Minister of Labour, and brought together the ambassadors of Germany, Italy and the United States, the IOM coordinator of operations and the UNHCR Liaison Officer in Tirana, with Head of the Information Programme as moderator.

Educational brochure linked with media campaign

104. An educational guide book entitled "Going Abroad" was also published in the context of the programme. The brochure underlines the down side of illegal departures while providing people with constructive information on how to apply for a visa to various countries, and how to qualify. It covers issues such as emigration and refugee status, and travel abroad for various reasons, including tourism, family visit, work, study, family reunion, business and medical care. Distribution began in May 1994 in Tirana. In order to attract and hold attention, it was put on sale at a subsidised price.

III. Impact of the programme

The final report provides some indicators of success

105. The joint programme's final report for the 1992-1994 period provides the following indicators of success:

The programme provoked a regular (if relatively small) response from listeners: 403 letters received between August 1992 and March 1994, averaging 20 letters a month, or 130 letters per million inhabitants.

The bulk of the letters came from the 19 to 40 age-group i.e. the core target group of potential emigrants; within the second most important group writing the letters, namely the 40 to 60 age group, most questions were reportedly concerned with clarifying the situation of the 19 to 40 years age-group.

More than 45 per cent of letters concerned departure (31 per cent to temporary work/emigration abroad; 14 per cent to permanent emigration), while 33 per cent related to family enquiries (including family news and family reunion);

31 per cent of letters came from women, and account for most of the queries about family reunion, family visits and the establishing contact with kin abroad.

The bulk of the letters came from the social groups hardest hit by unemployment: workers, students/intellectuals, and farmers.

The letters came from all parts of the country (albeit with a larger concentration in Tirana).

There was no follow-up sampling to test impact

106. The report gives some statistical evidence of the programme's success in reaching the targeted group in terms of age, sex, and socio-economic conditions for most regions of Albania. No indication is provided, however, on what influence the answers provided by the Information Programme had on letter writers' subsequent behaviour. People were apparently interested in the programme, wrote letters and asked a variety of questions, some of which were related to departure, but there was no follow-up of a sample of persons whose questions had been answered, which could have been extrapolated to reflect a pattern of influence on the audience as a whole.

The final report's assessment of impact

107. The report mentions three types of impact as follows:

More people in Albania are aware that illegal departure to Western Europe is not a valid option than when the programme started.

These include responsible people in the media, who are thus in a better position to

reflect this in their daily output.

There had been no new attempts at mass exodus as experienced in 1991 (at the time of writing the report).

108. In addition, it is mentioned that "the radio programme has a steady number of listeners and of letter writers", from which it is concluded that "it both fulfils a need which continues to exist, and satisfies the requirements of the listener".

The final report isolates the campaign from overall strategy

109. The final report presents the information programme as if it were an independent initiative dealing single-handedly with the Albanian mass exodus. Its impact is considered in isolation of the comprehensive package of development and assistance programmes aimed at improving the situation in Albania which was launched at the same time. It should be noted, however, that the programme was endorsed as a component of a strategy developed jointly by a number of European governments and international organisations following the political and economic collapse of Albania, and the consequent mass population movement out of the country.

110. This is illustrated by the fact that when the European countries who were receiving the bulk of the Albanian emigrants met in Geneva on 29 April 1992, the Joint IOM/UNHCR Special Information Unit was among the participants. The conclusions of that and subsequent meetings pointed to the need for a comprehensive strategy to reduce emigration pressures in Albania, including substantial G-24 economic aid; UNFPA, UNDP, IOM and UNHCR programmes; limited labour export agreements; vocational training projects for return; continued IOM efforts to find regular emigration outlets; and, to discourage irregular movements, a IOM/UNHCR information programme.

Statistics would have helped measure impact

111. In this context it would have been useful to have used statistics in an effort to measure the impact of the campaign:

A statistical statement of the increase or decrease in the number of legal departures could have served as a yardstick to determine through a sample survey to what extent legal emigrants had based their decision to leave on the Migration Information Programme.

Even though the exodus continued until it peaked in the summer of 1997, such statistical data would also have permitted a preliminary assessment of the impact of the principal internationally funded programmes (even if only marginal), which in turn could have given a realistic sense of the probable impact of the information programme.

More specifically, if aid could be shown to have had some impact on the rate of unemployment within the emigration-prone 19 to 39 age group, it could be reasonably claimed that the campaign had probably contributed to convincing potential emigrants to stay.

IV. Second Albania Migration Information Programme (1997- present)

112. Following political developments which resulted in a change of government and renewed economic collapse, the emigration outflow peaked in mid-1997, in a movement directed mostly to Italy.

113. An assessment mission undertaken by the former Head of the Information Unit to Albania recommended that a new campaign on the model of the Migration Information Programme be launched, with UNHCR sub-contracting to the Vienna-based International Centre for Migration Policy and Development, this time without IOM. The project had the full support of the Albanian authorities and was funded for some US\$ 124,000 by Italy.

114. This campaign has obtained an excellent response from the population at large, possibly due to the fact that the information broadcast covers subjects such as methods of visa obtention and ways of setting up businesses. As it has been observed that a number of departures are related to medical problems, a doctor has also been included in the radio programme's team in order to give direct replies to queries about health issues.

MASS INFORMATION CAMPAIGN IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

I. Background

115. With the end of the Cold War and the opening of the borders of the former Soviet Union the need for mass information activities in the Russian Federation was foreseen and investigated by UNHCR.

116. An initial proposal was drawn up by the MIU in 1993 and an appeal for funding was issued to Denmark, Germany, Norway, Switzerland, the European Community, Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden and the USA. The programme had the following objectives:

preventing irregular population movements towards Western European countries, which were widely anticipated with the opening of international borders in the former socialist block.

promoting an atmosphere conducive to the acceptance and integration of ethnic Russians and other categories of displaced persons moving into Russia from the CIS countries and the Baltic States.

sensitising the population at large to the concept of asylum, to refugee-related aspects of human rights and to tolerance of foreigners and people of non-Russian ethnic background. This was an opportunity for UNHCR to promote its image and awareness of its mandate.

117. Although the mass information programme had been on the drawing board since 1993 implementation only started in late 1994. The delay may be attributed to the difficulty faced by UNHCR in establishing and developing a fully-fledged office in Russia.

II. The 1994-1996 mass information campaign

Weekly broadcasts on migration issues

118. The first mass information activity developed in the Russian Federation was a weekly radio broadcast addressing emigration issues. The programme was aired on Radio Russia, a member of the Ostankino government-controlled media group. The station is credited with one of the largest audiences in the former Soviet Union, estimated at some fifty million listeners. Its programmes reach countries in the Caucasus, Central Asia and beyond, as well as the Baltic States. The format of the weekly broadcast was mainly based on answering questions and other written correspondence addressed to the station by listeners.

119. Originally, the programme was run 'live' on the air by a moderator. This gave it a spontaneous and lively character which, as demonstrated by the copious correspondence and numerous telephone calls received in the UNHCR Moscow office, was much appreciated by the audience. Most questions were related to the possibility of emigrating and working abroad.

120. At a later stage, the structure was changed and most of the responsibility for the UNHCR Radio Russia programme was assumed by the Mass Information Unit in Geneva. The Regional Office in Moscow merely acted as a relay, translating incoming letters, receiving in exchange ready-made programme recordings which were then aired by the station. While the intention was undoubtedly to guarantee utmost accuracy in treating the sensitive issues of emigration and asylum opportunities, staff who had been involved with the project felt that the new format was not as successful as the original one.

Impact of the programme

121. Impact measurement has been only approximate, with conclusions drawn from the volume of correspondence and other contacts with listeners. According to RO Moscow staff the relaying of a recorded foreign voice systematically responding to issues raised in letters written long before the date of broadcasting, was not necessarily conducive to credibility or trust. In some cases, the programmes were considered as propaganda. Furthermore, the many listeners may have found the rigid format of questions and answers and the absence of debating on the air unappealing.

122. The programme was closed in December 1995, partly for lack of continued funding. Other factors reported include the other overwhelming operational demands faced by the RO in Moscow, lack of available staff, and shifting priorities in the Mass Information Unit in Geneva.

Lessons learned

123. One of the main lessons to be learned from this project is therefore the need for better methods of impact measurement. No evaluation was attempted and UNHCR relied entirely on the perception of local staff that the later format was somewhat inadequate.

III. Other mass media activities

Production and broadcasting of documentary films (1995-1996)

124. Another important mass information activity developed during the winter of 1995-1996 was the production and broadcasting of documentary films. Six programmes were filmed under the title 'Aliens' by Presto, an independent television company well connected with the Educational Channel of Russian TV.

125. Originally, the films were all to be shown on the Educational Channel only, but in due course national television Ostankino Channel I agreed to re-broadcast them as well. This arrangement ensured the widest possible audience. The documentaries were also used in various news programmes. Broadcasts were announced in the specialised sections of various newspapers and magazines, which on their own initiative printed preview descriptions.

126. The films addressed a wide range of issues in the domain of human rights, migration, asylum etc. The Presto team spared no efforts to make the programmes interesting. Footage was shot on location in various regions of the CIS and people from all sectors concerned were interviewed. The last documentary addressed exclusively the CIS Conference and related issues. The reaction to the programmes was felt to be very positive, but here again, no evaluation or impact measurement was undertaken.

Workshop for Russian opinion-makers

127. On the fringe of mass information activities, one may include the workshop for Russian opinion-makers organised in February 1995. The aim of the workshop was to attract the attention of Russian journalists to migration and asylum-related issues. It was attended by leading journalists from newspapers, radio and television stations from St. Petersburg and Moscow. UNHCR and Government experts also participated. The workshop led to the establishment of a group of 'Friends of UNHCR'. This group is the major interlocutor of the UNHCR public information unit in Moscow.

Handbook on visa procedures

128. A UNHCR handbook on visa procedures was also planned for publication in late 1995. A consultant was hired and preparatory work was undertaken. The project was abandoned, however, by UNHCR Headquarters, for reasons which were not entirely clear to UNHCR Moscow staff.

IV Future and planned activities

129. A number of pertinent and apparently relatively inexpensive mass information activities have been proposed by staff in the RO in Moscow. They include:

- expansion of the 1995 TV documentary series on migration and refugee issues;
- development of regional radio programmes with (1) broadcasts on population displacement issues in the CIS countries and (2) question and answer programmes on refugee-related issues;
- continuation of tolerance poster campaign in Moscow;
- contribute to the preparation of tolerance education materials for students and school teachers.

130. Some caution may need to be exercised, however, given that not all the objectives in previous mass information programmes were achieved, nor was their impact properly measured.

131. Given the limited staff resources of UNHCR Moscow, and the shortfall in overall funding, it may be wise to focus on specifically operational assistance-information or mass communication objectives, directly linked to persons of concern to the High Commissioner. In Moscow alone there are tens of thousands of asylum-seekers or mandate refugees. While many may be de facto integrated, at least several thousands of these urban refugees are barely surviving in very precarious conditions. Equilibre, UNHCR's implementing partner in Moscow, is doing its

best in providing vital assistance to selected cases. On the mass communication front, however, priority should perhaps be given at this juncture to providing all the needy refugees with practical information on how to survive, where to seek assistance and obtain advice and protection.

THE MASS INFORMATION CAMPAIGN IN SIERRA LEONE

I. Background

132. The events of May 1997 shattered hopes for a normalisation of the situation in Sierra Leone and brought the repatriation of refugees from neighbouring countries to a halt. After the violent military coup, UNHCR was forced to abandon its activities and resign itself to observing subsequent developments from neighbouring Guinea. Despite occasional cease-fire agreements negotiated by the ECOMOG intervention forces which were trying to restore legitimate authority in the country, the prevailing instability and confusion did not allow for realistic repatriation planning.

133. Nevertheless, the developments in Sierra Leone prior to the coup and UNHCR's planning for repatriation provide a valuable example of the integration of mass information activities in a repatriation strategy. The steps leading to planning and designing of these activities are briefly summarised below.

134. A Plan of Operation for the repatriation and reintegration of Sierra Leonean refugees was issued by UNHCR in March 1997, following the signature, in November 1996, of a Peace Agreement between the Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary Front of Sierra Leone. A visit by the president of Sierra Leone to the refugee camps in Guinea during which he encouraged refugees to return home further increased prospects for an early return. A Tripartite Agreement between the Government of Sierra Leone, the Government of Liberia and UNHCR was signed and the joint decision made to develop "a campaign to provide the refugees with objective and accurate information relevant to their repatriation and reintegration so that they shall be able to make the decision to repatriate in full knowledge of the facts".

135. At the beginning of 1997, the total number of Sierra Leonean refugees in the region was estimated at 355,000 persons (232,000 in Guinea and 123,000 in Liberia). Subsequently, it was claimed that the general security situation in the country had improved and that internally displaced Sierra Leoneans as well as refugees in neighbouring Guinea and Liberia had been returning to their homes in significant numbers.

II. Preparation of the mass communication campaign

Programme parameters

136. As part of a repatriation strategy, the information campaign was to focus on the Sierra Leonean refugee population in the camps of Liberia and Guinea, its aim being to promote voluntary repatriation through the provision of objective factual information. The plan was designed around broadcasts by two radio stations operating from inside Sierra Leone: the Sierra Leone Broadcasting System in FreeTown, and the Kiss M station in Bo. Implementation was to be carried out by a UK-based NGO, Conciliation Resources, established in 1994. The agency was to provide the two radio stations with the necessary equipment, broadcasting training and production support to reach Sierra Leonean refugees in the countries of asylum, Guinea, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire, while endowing them with the capacity to produce and disseminate information about community development among returnees inside Sierra Leone.

137. The campaign was to be completed by various other means, such as holding meetings with refugees in the camps, distributing posters and leaflets and organising cross-border visits by refugee leaders to permit them to personally experience the conditions in their country of origin and report back on them in the camps. In addition, government representatives from Sierra Leone were to be encouraged to visit refugee camps in the countries of asylum.

138. The campaign plan was developed on the basis of a country assessment carried out by the UNHCR Mass Information Unit. Among the major information needs identified were: security, the national and local political climate, reconciliation, repatriation schedules, the state of the country's infrastructure, the repatriation package and other reintegration assistance and services, the condition of those already returned and the state of the economy. The mission also had access to audience research material, and hence was able to confirm that individual radio reception would be the most appropriate medium for reaching the refugee as well as returnee population.

III. Conclusions

139. The organisation by the Mass Information Unit of the mass communication campaign in Sierra Leone progressed well. The first MIU mission was fortunate to find adequate audience research data; basic broadcasting infrastructure was in place; the size of the country made logistics manageable. Finally, a competent potential implementing partner happened to be well established in the centre of the country. It was therefore relatively easy for the MIU to assemble all the necessary elements to launch an effective mass information system.

The medium is the message

140. As regards content, however, there remained several unanswered questions as to what message was to be delivered, who would be designing the message, and how the quality would be controlled. Although Conciliation resources could be expected to take on much of the task, preparatory documents, reports and project descriptions do not contain any indication of how the message would be designed, monitored and adapted to a changing situation, and what UNHCR's involvement would be in this connection.

Lessons

141. While a UNHCR-imposed content may not effectively meet all the goals of an information campaign, the initiative on discussing and setting up a framework for the campaign should rest with the organisation. One lesson to be learned from this delayed operation might therefore be that in mass communication campaigns, as much attention must be given to constructing the message as to choosing the carrier.

142. Another lesson is the need for, at the very least, a basic progress monitoring exercise to be designed at the project planning stage. This project appears to lack such built-in evaluation mechanisms, whether they be in qualitative monitoring, impact assessment or evaluation of the campaign.

THE UNHCR MASS COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGN IN THE GREAT LAKES 1995-1996

I. Background

143. Radio broadcasting played a decisive role in the dramatic events in Rwanda starting in April 1994, which led to the massive exodus of more than two million refugees to neighbouring Zaire, Tanzania and Burundi. Radio Mille Collines first launched a campaign to incite the Hutu population to demonise and murder the Tutsi, in the name of what the radio called "liberation". Later, as Tutsi military forces advanced and took power in Kigali, the same station repeatedly urged the Hutu population to flee "the mortal danger of the rebels" in the wake of their routed leadership.

144. UNHCR in turn used mass communication techniques and campaigns (in co-operation with NGOs) for various purposes in the refugee camps, and in particular to support efforts to promote voluntary repatriation.

145. As the refugee camps were organised in the three countries of asylum from April 1994 on, the various UNHCR offices carried out ad hoc assistance-related and other information activities. These included regular radio broadcasts in co-operation with NGOs. It was only a year later, in early 1995, however, that a mass communication campaign was initiated, and it only became fully operational in July 1995. The campaign's objectives were twofold: first, to penetrate the curtain of propaganda which continued to prevent the refugee population from having an objective view of conditions in Rwanda; and second, to promote refugee decisions in favour of repatriation.

146. Meanwhile, between July and October 1994, some 200,000 refugees returned to Rwanda from the five main camps of the Goma area in Eastern Zaire. The trend was short-lived, however, and only some 50,000 more repatriated before the events in Eastern Zaire forced massive returns between June and December 1996.

147. This case study seeks to assess the impact of mass communication on voluntary repatriation, while recalling that the return of the vast majority of the refugee population was coerced and occurred outside UNHCR channels.

The pre-campaign period: ad hoc delivery of information phase (July to December 1994)

148. This period included the mass arrival of refugees in the countries of asylum, and their

establishment in camps. The UNHCR offices in Zaire, Burundi and Tanzania initially improvised with what scant technical material they had (e.g. microphones and loudspeakers) in order to disseminate factual information about available assistance to the refugees and direct them to the safest and most appropriate camp sites. In addition to these standard assistance information activities, efforts were made early on to establish a dialogue with the refugees about repatriation, even though mixed messages were being received about security conditions in Rwanda.

149. UNHCR staff in Tanzania, for example, organised one-hour meetings with groups of refugees twice a week, to inform them on possibilities of repatriation. The regular returns which took place temporarily from February 1995, (i.e. some 100 persons per week) may be partly attributed to these meetings. Several factors soon resulted in the interruption of the returns, however: the extreme difficulties encountered in the return; rumours in the camps about atrocities suffered by returnees; and confirmed killings of returnees in Rwanda, as with the Kibeho massacre in April 1995.

150. The first use of radio by UNHCR in the Great Lakes was in mid-1994, when the French branch of the NGO Reporters sans Frontières developed a small experimental information project in Eastern Zaire, with UNHCR funding. The NGO gathered factual information about Rwanda, which was broadcast by Radio Gatasha, a radio operating in the UNHCR office in Goma. UNHCR oversaw the programme and monitored contents. The effort was short-lived, however, as the NGO ended the programme after only two months.

151. In August 1994, the Swiss branch of Reporters sans Frontières (which operated Fondation Hirondelle in Kigali and Bukavu with funding from the Department for Development and Cooperation of the Swiss Government) in its turn set up Radio Agatashiya as a non-partisan, humanitarian station broadcasting on various subjects: the availability of health, educational and social services, the activities of humanitarian agencies (the UN agencies, ICRC and the NGOs), the possibilities of family reunion, and world events.

152. The initial information programme carried out in the camps of Eastern Zaire is estimated to have covered some 60 per cent of the total refugee population. Though no attempt was made by UNHCR to evaluate its impact, it can reasonably be concluded that the programme was an adequate response to the need for information, in the chaotic period when refugees were arriving in the camps.

II. The Mass Information Campaign

153. Fondation Hirondelle and Radio Agatashiya were to become essential components of the UNHCR Mass Information Campaign which began in 1995. There was a growing perception that the refugee presence continued to be a highly destabilising factor in the region. Despite verified atrocities in Rwanda which forced interruptions, promoting repatriation was high on UNHCR's agenda, as was made clear in the High Commissioner's statements during her tour of the region in February, and in the UNHCR Plan of Action presented at the Bujumbura Conference in the same month.

Campaign parameters and administrative structure

154. Given the strong oral tradition in Rwanda, the determinant influence of the radio, and the size of the target-population, the campaign was mainly designed in terms of radio broadcasts. By November 1995, however, questions of credibility led to the adoption of video material as an additional essential element of the campaign. Video production was carried out by one international consultant and three local journalists attached to the UNHCR MIU.

155. A Plan of Action for the establishment of a mass information campaign in the Great Lakes Region was prepared by the UNHCR MIU in Geneva in March 1995. It comprised the following essential features:

Appointment of a Mass Information Co-ordinator to be attached to the Office of the UNHCR Special Envoy in Kigali, and having authority to co-ordinate all mass information activities regionally, in the country of origin and countries of asylum, with the aim of ensuring a uniform delivery of information to all Rwandan refugees. Under the Co-ordinator, a Mass Information Unit was set up in Kigali, with support staff increasing from one assistant in January 1995 to three assistants and two consultants in 1996.

Close co-ordination between the UNHCR mass information unit and Fondation Hirondelle and Radio Agatashiya, which was to be strengthened, increasing its broadcasting range to

cover the camps in Zaire, Tanzania and Burundi, so as to "ensure the establishment of a differentiated but uniform and consistent channel of communication with the whole Rwandan refugee population".

This was to be done in two ways: by addressing issues of common interest to all the refugee population (i.e. conditions in Rwanda and details of UNHCR assistance for return and reintegration), and by tailoring certain messages to particular refugee camps according to the socio-political profile of the population, which was by no means homogeneous.

Campaign statistics

156. The campaign targeted the entire population of 2,037,846 Rwandese refugees: 1,198,456 in Eastern Zaire, 651,090 in Tanzania and 188,300 in Burundi.

157. Total expenditure amounted to US\$ 1,100,351, which breaks down as follows:

Salaries (implementing partner and HCR salary and related staff costs; excludes MIU co-ordinator salary): 1995: \$222,709 (1996: \$345,760 budgeted);

Technical equipment (implementing partner and HCR budgets) 1995: \$140,956 (1996: \$215,800 budgeted);

Other items \$42,376.

Total expenditure: 1995: \$406,041; 1996: 694,310; 1995-96 total 1995/96: \$1,100,351.

70% of administrative and operational costs were funded by the department for Development and Cooperation of the Swiss Government, Chaîne de Bonheur, and the foundation "Dignité et Detention".

Creating a radio network: political obstacles

158. UNHCR signed a sub-agreement with Fondation Hirondelle for a six month programme (July to December 1995). Interviews were to be carried out in Rwanda and the camps by a team of eight journalists operating from the NGO's studio in Kigali, in close co-ordination with the UNHCR team, which oversaw editing and production of material for broadcast.

159. Unfortunately the extension of Radio Agatashiya's broadcasts to the whole region met with political obstacles, both in Burundi and Tanzania, so that coverage was limited to Eastern Zaire. The Rwandese authorities were particularly concerned that a mass information campaign would disseminate information about Rwanda in the camps without their own active participation. The campaign was finally (albeit reluctantly) accepted when UNHCR agreed to have its own and Fondation Hirondelle's material broadcast by Radio Rwanda, the state radio, and to pay for the service.

160. Although the credibility of material transmitted by the state radio was bound to be questioned by the refugee population, it was considered important to include Radio Rwanda, which was one of the most listened-to official radios in the camps, in order to ensure use of all available media channels. Other stations included in the network were Radio Agatashiya (with transmitters in Bukavu and Goma), Radio Kvizera in Ngara, Tanzania (run by the Jesuit Refugee Service, JRS), Radio Burundi (the state radio of Burundi), and Radio UNAMIR (United Nations Mission in Rwanda), which participated marginally by occasionally broadcasting some of the UNHCR-produced material.

161. The network sought to compete for refugees' attention with other (non-official) media sources by broadcasting in long-wave and in *kenyarwanda*, the language spoken by the vast majority of the refugees, as well as French and English. It was difficult, however, to compete with stations such as Radio Mille Collines, Radio Amhoro, Radio Star, all of which systematically provided negative information about Rwanda. Fondation Hirondelle's production and broadcast schedules during the campaign were as follows:

February-June 1995: 30 interviews for broadcasting through Radio Rwanda (15 minutes twice a week) and radio Agatashiya.

July-December 1995: 51 magazines of between 12 to 50 minutes produced in Kigali for use for UNHCR broadcasts, including Radio Agatashiya; ten special reports ("reportages") carried out by UNHCR journalists and broadcast through Radio Agatashiya; 100 magazines

of interviews showing UNHCR, NGO and local Zairian authorities in the camps during sensitisation meetings; daily information news bulletins regarding repatriation.

The campaign's material occupied an average half-hour per day within the daily broadcasting time of eight hours per day (Monday to Friday) and ten hours per day (week-ends). Radio Agatashiya broadcast in *kenyarwanda*, French and English, reaching a potential audience of more than a million refugees.

The video project

162. The UNHCR video project began with pilot video showings in the camps in Burundi (November 1995), followed in Tanzania shortly thereafter (November-December 1995). In the camps in Zaire, the project had to be postponed until May 1996, because, among other difficulties, of the security risks involved in organising mass video viewings. As was the case for radio, reliance on video material was greater in Eastern Zaire than in Tanzania and Burundi, where direct communication organised by UNHCR staff and border visits reduced the scope for mass information methods.

163. The Rwandese authorities also had an off-again, on-again attitude to the video campaign: one month after the video showing started in Burundi, the Government formally requested UNHCR to stop mass information activities, and refused authorisation to film inside Rwanda. Some time later, this position was reversed and authorisation was granted. This was reported to be typical of the difficulties which the MIU had to face throughout the campaign.

164. Despite the constraints, the video project generated great interest among refugees. The images had obvious impact; and refugees made many requests to UNHCR for the video team to film particular villages, and specific people known to have returned there. In all, more than 100 out of a total 145 communes of origin of the refugees were covered by either radio or video, or both, although coverage was more concentrated on communes in the border provinces from which the majority of refugees originated.

165. In 1996, some 60 videos were produced. In the five camps in Goma alone, some 700,000 persons viewed the material in the first semester of 1996. Although it is not clear what credibility was given the material, at least in some cases it had some influence on the decision to return. This is illustrated in the UNHCR video "Le rapatriement volontaire" (Mass Information Unit, Kigali, 1996), in which a refugee confirms that the video material seen by him and his family in the camp was an important factor in their decision to go back home: "...it took me one year and a half to decide, and I hesitated because I believed that people were killed on return. My children also believed that. Until we saw a neighbour on one of the videos, we thought he had been killed, but he hadn't. So we decided to return".

III. Operational principles:

Use of mutually reinforcing communication channels

166. The credibility of radio programmes based on interviews and press reports, produced in Rwanda, was frequently questioned in the camps. Cross-border visits, the method preferred by the refugees to obtain credible first-hand information, and videos were therefore introduced towards the end of 1995 as mutually reinforcing communication channels.

167. In the camps of Eastern Zaire, selection of volunteers to visit Rwanda was extremely difficult, due to political pressures on the refugees by the Hutu leadership. The strained political relations between Zaire and Rwanda caused an added difficulty for the crossings. The refugees who were in favour of the visits tended to be persons with little authority who, on their return to the camps, did not dare describe conditions as they had seen them, and finally made negative statements about their visits. The MIU dealt with this by filming the visits and showing them in the camps without commentary.

168. In the Tanzanian camps, on the other hand, there was no lack of volunteers. Even before the video programme was established, UNHCR staff accompanying the visits took numerous photographs which were later displayed on boards in the camps. Similarly in Burundi, the fact that the refugees were among the least politicised made cross-border visits possible.

Reinforcement of radio and audio-visual messages

169. Discussion groups were used to clarify and reinforce the information conveyed through the radio and video campaigns. In Goma, locally-recruited, camp-based repatriation assistants, operating out of 17 camp information centres, organised refugee discussion groups based on

viewings of the video material. The campaign also included coverage of activities by NGOs, whose personnel then followed up with the refugees on the discussions organised by UNHCR staff.

To give comprehensive information about Rwanda

170. Propaganda was successfully maintaining the refugees' memories of Rwanda as a country devastated by violent fighting, rape, murder and indiscriminate destruction.. The campaign therefore sought to counteract ongoing propaganda by giving comprehensive, objective information to refugees about daily life in Rwanda, together with details of what support they could obtain from UNHCR. This included agriculture and other socio-economic activities; markets; the system of Justice; the Rwandan authorities; the relationship among communities; reconstruction activities including housing schemes and the building of schools and medical centres; medical and educational services. UNHCR repatriation assistance (provision of transport, plastic tents, blankets) and the modalities of the return movements (across the border, and through entry points and reception centres) were also described.

To convey experiences undergone by returnees with their own voices and their images

171. Returnees were followed to their villages, and were visited later to monitor their situations. Radio and video interviews were then broadcast and shown through the mass communication network.

Include information about negative situations and difficulties in the country of origin

172. The fact that the targeted population had access to an over-abundance of negative information, whether objective or distorted, was continuously debated among staff. Some felt there was therefore no need for UNHCR to include negative information in its material. Others considered, however, that to meet UNHCR's protection concerns, potential returnees should not be given a misleadingly positive picture of the country of origin. Moreover, inclusion of such information would contribute to credibility.

173. Important practical information about difficulties encountered by returnees was therefore presented and discussed. This included such subjects as problems related to property (for example when a Hutu's house is occupied by a Tutsi, and he comes to an agreement for the Tutsi to pay rent). Other issues included health and educational services, and problems specific to women (such as the recently changed laws of inheritance, whereby women can inherit from their deceased husbands). Sensitive issues of security were covered during the discussion groups.

IV. Impact of the campaign

Evaluation by an independent expert

174. A study conducted in the three countries of asylum in March 1996 for Fondation Hironnelle by a sociologist (Stefano Castagno) describes refugees' response to the broadcasts of five radio-stations: Radio Rwanda, Radio Agatashiya, Radio Burundi, Radio UNAMIR and Radio Kwizera.

175. Based on data obtained in eight of the total of 59 camps, the study found that refugees regarded all communications about Rwanda with distrust. Castagno reported that a majority (51 per cent) believed no second-hand sources, only what they could see or hear direct from the sources; a significant minority (26 per cent) believed that some communications were credible; while a smaller number (15 per cent) believed that all communications from certain sources were likely to be credible.

176. As far as the latter two groups were concerned, the study noted a tendency for the refugees to evaluate credibility of communications from all sources about the same subject in group discussions. The study also found that radio was regarded by these refugees as the best source. With regard to the first group of extreme sceptics, however, the study suggested that the only way to inform them was by means of cross-border visits.

177. The study concluded that widespread acceptance of objective information by the refugees required the simultaneous use of all means of communication. Coverage of cross-border visits by both radio and video was found to maximise their impact and contribute to creating a climate of transparency and trust.

Numbers of listeners as a criterion of impact

178. Although the very large number of persons exposed to the campaign has been used in

reports as an indicator of its success, they fail to mention two key aspects, namely access to a radio set, and the ability to buy batteries. According to the Castagno study, only 45 per cent of the target audience possessed a radio. Even though many refugees listened on a group basis, the number of actual listeners is probably significantly smaller than the number of potential listeners living within the radio's broadcasting range.

Influencing opinion formation as a criterion of impact

179. Initially, the mass information campaign had raised significant, if unrealistic, expectations in UNHCR regarding its ability to influence refugees to return home. From that point of view, the small number of refugees who actually went back to Rwanda would seem to indicate that the campaign failed.

180. A more positive evaluation may be made, however, taking into account the limitations inherent in any information campaign. In this regard, a realistic assessment of the anticipated link between the campaign and repatriation was given in the UNHCR sub-project description drafted in Geneva in mid-1995:

The provision of accurate and neutral information to refugees is a key element in the implementation of any strategy developed in support of a given humanitarian policy.

This is especially the case in Rwanda, where the prominent role played by propaganda and misinformation renders dissemination of neutral and impartial information an indispensable component of the global effort to assist Rwandan refugees.

A mass information campaign can contribute to the creation of an atmosphere conducive to reconciliation and eventually facilitate the process of voluntary repatriation to Rwanda.

181. A former Coordinator of the Mass Information Unit in Kigali saw only a distant link between the campaign and the decision to return, but he recognised that the campaign none the less provided a powerful counter to rumours, propaganda and misinformation. Furthermore, even though the Castagno study indicates that information provided by the campaign was criticised by refugees for ignoring the crucial aspect of security, it did provide images whose credibility could not be denied: markets functioning, destroyed bridges rebuilt, tea plantations growing and, most importantly, that friends, neighbours and relatives were still alive.

182. Refugees further criticised Radio Agatashiya for its perceived reluctance to irritate the Rwandan authorities and inform on negative situations. A connected issue is the reliability of interviewees' statements: one former UNHCR interviewer felt that concern for their own safety may often have caused them to report on their experiences according to Rwandan authorities' expectations.

183. Although the information channelled by the campaign was only part of a variety of messages which refugees considered in reaching an opinion about conditions in Rwanda, it clearly did help to convince some people to repatriate. According to the above-mentioned UNHCR video, "... one third of the returnees say that the information provided by UNHCR contributed to their return".

184. It must be mentioned, however, that this was happening at a time when other factors were undermining the leaders' control: the prolonged stay in overcrowded camps; the refugees' frustrations at not being able to produce their own food and suspicions that their property was being used by strangers; their weariness with the uninterrupted pressures by leaders who offered nothing in exchange.

V. Co-ordination and other issues

Differences of approach by sub-offices in the three asylum countries

185. Although UNHCR adopted a repatriation policy in principle from July 1994, evolving circumstances influenced implementation. Events in Rwanda led to lengthy interruptions, and in any case made it extremely difficult for field staff to evaluate the extent to which repatriation should be merely facilitated or actively encouraged. In this context, significant differences in approach to the use of the campaign to promote repatriation seem to have existed among sub-offices in the three countries of asylum.

186. In Eastern Zaire, conditions gradually led the UNHCR office in Goma to overcome its initial

scepticism and to devote much time and resources to the campaign, albeit at the cost of minimising security risks in Rwanda. The political and social destabilisation caused by the large number of refugees in the Kivu area; the continual pressures for repatriation from the Zairian authorities; the growing international support for this position linked with dwindling donor-support for the care and maintenance operation; the perception by the Rwandese authorities that extremists among the refugee leadership were increasingly transforming the camps into anti-Rwandese strongholds; the crowded and insalubrious conditions in camps, all were factors which led UNHCR Goma to actively promote repatriation as an unavoidable political necessity.

187. In both Tanzania and Burundi, on the other hand, prevailing circumstances permitted the adoption of a more traditional approach, with far less pressure to push repatriation through mass information activities. The sub-offices in both countries therefore appear to have had a much more limited participation in the campaign.

188. This difference of approach, despite the fact that repatriation was apparently the only viable option for almost the entire caseload, underlines the need for closer co-ordination in such a campaign. In this respect, only one co-ordination meeting, chaired by the UNHCR Special Envoy, was held in Kigali on 23 November 1995, to reach consensus about various issues, including: the basic concepts of the campaign, the supply of information to different UNHCR offices; the content and frequency of information dissemination by different channels (radio, video, direct presentations).

Delays in delivering technical equipment and logistical difficulties hampered the campaign

189. Staff interviewed pointed out that:

the equipment necessary to film and reproduce the videos, and the televisions required to present video material to the refugees, only arrived in Rwanda eight months after being requested. A television set, a video camera and a VCR had to be borrowed from staff members.

Similar delays were mentioned regarding the delivery of other technical material.

Some mass information campaign staff found it difficult to obtain the required logistical support, i.e. vehicles for field-trips, and encountered other bureaucratic obstacles.

V. Post 1996

190. In the forced return to Rwanda in November 1996, the independence of thought which the campaign may have encouraged among the refugees became largely ineffectual under the wave of violence which pushed some of the refugees back to Rwanda, and others to a tragic flight into the forests of Eastern Zaire. However, in 1997, radio continued to play its role even there, with BBC and Voice of America broadcasts providing the refugees with information about where to turn for assistance. Inside Rwanda, the mass information campaign continued to provide factual information about available assistance in the difficult moment of return and reintegration in the villages.