

Teacher's Notes: Supplying Food in an Emergency

Purpose

Students develop their critical thinking skills and knowledge of humanitarian emergency responses to disasters, by exploring the scenario of establishing a refugee/internally displaced persons camp in a conflict situation, with a particular focus on meeting food and nutrition requirements.

Through a series of questions, students are led to think through the complexities of providing food in emergency situations.

Resources

- Marker pens
- Optional butcher's paper

Activity

> Classroom set-up

This activity would suit changing the set-up of the classroom, with students either seated in a U-shape or sitting on the floor rather than at their desks. It would also suit taking students outside to sit. The change in seating can enhance the atmosphere of the scenario, by taking students away from the familiar setting of their traditional classroom.

> Setting the scene

Ask students to imagine that they live in a small rural village in Africa, and read the following scenario:

“You typically spend your days doing chores, like walking to collect water from the local well, and small-scale farming. You grow a limited range of crops for your own consumption, and if there is extra, you sell it to raise money to pay for things like healthcare. You do not have many possessions.

Recently there have been stories of a militia, hiding in the nearby forest, who have been attacking villages and fighting against the national army. People have been killed, kidnapped, and houses and fields burnt.

One day, as you are returning home from the fields, you hear sounds of screaming and gunfire in the distance. Dropping your tools, you run to your house, gather your family, and grab a few small, random items, before running away from your village. You manage to escape the attacking militia.

Eventually you make your way to a main road. There are other people on the road, who have also escaped the violence. One of them tells you he has heard that a refugee camp has recently been set up. It is several days' walk, but you and your

family agree to make the journey, knowing this is your best chance for survival – you have lost everything you owned and you have no money.”

> Arriving at the camp

Advise students they have the clothes they are wearing, and a blanket. Everything else was left behind. They have eaten all the food they had with them on the journey to the camp.

- As a group, ask them to discuss and identify: what do they need?

Note: Give students a few minutes for this activity. It may be useful to write answers on the board or, if outside, on a piece of butcher’s paper.

Option: Students could be broken into small groups, given butcher’s paper, and asked to come up with a list of things they think they need when they arrive at the camp. Students could then report back to the group a couple of the items they came up with. When all groups have shared, ask the groups if anyone has any other items that have not yet been mentioned.

If students have missed any of the important, high-level requirements, advise them of what else they would need.

Option: Could either tell students directly, or could draw out through a series of questions. Eg: “So where would you sleep...” “What would you sleep on...” and so forth.

> Going deeper

Advise students that they will now need to think about one of these high-level needs in more detail – specifically, the need for food. Food is essential – it is required for survival, in sufficient quantities and quality for health, and as such is specifically mentioned in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Option: This could be done as either a whole-class discussion, or a small-group brainstorm, as per the previous.

Alternatively it could be undertaken as a series of questions from the teacher to the students, prompting them to think of what it takes to provide, cook, eat, store and dispose of food and food-related items.

Provide students with an example of the requirement for organisations supporting refugees/internally displaced people in camps to think more comprehensively about what people arriving in the camp need.

For example: how much food do people need? The answer to this is – it will depend. What age range are people in the camp? Is anyone malnourished or unwell, and so require additional treatment?

Special care and food is provided for everyone in the community. There are internationally-agreed standards¹ on the food requirements for an average population, which are used for planning purposes in the initial stage of a disaster. This includes food that provides 2,100 kilo-calories per day, of which 10-12% of the total energy needs to be protein and 17% of the total energy needs to be fat. There are specific requirements for the amount of vitamins and minerals that need to be provided in the food.

In addition to this, it needs to be food that is of good quality, that has been handled in a hygienic manner, and that people know how to cook with. When providing food, organisations need to consider: Is it culturally appropriate? Is it ready to eat, dry or wet food? Do they have the right equipment/kitchen utensils to prepare the food?

Food then has to be acquired in sufficient quantities to meet the daily needs of potentially tens of thousands of people living in the camp. The food needs to be transported to the camp, and equitably distributed. For this reason, often in established camps, ration cards are used, and a week's or even a month's-worth of rations are distributed in one go.

The affected communities also need to have their voices heard, and to participate in the discussion around food provision. They need information about how much food will be provided, how this will take place, and for how long.

- Ask students to discuss and identify everything, as arrivals to the camp that they need in order to meet their requirement for 'food'.

Option: If students are struggling, they may benefit from being given categories to think about in their brainstorming, such as: What do they need to get/receive the food; to store it; to cook it; to eat it; for disposal (of any spoilt food/un-reusable packaging/human waste post-consumption).

Ask students to share their answers. If students have missed any important requirements related to food, advise them or draw out from them what else they would need.

> In the real world

First ensure students understand the difference between 'refugees' and 'internally displaced people'.

A **refugee** is a person who has fled his or her country of origin in fear of being persecuted because of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group.

An **internally displaced person** is someone who has been forced to migrate within the borders of their own country².

Share with students the following information:

As at the end of 2009, there were over 8,800,000 refugees globally. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) also protected/assisted over 15,600,000 Internally Displaced People³.

Assisting refugees and internally displaced people is a complex and difficult task. Each situation is different, and when people have had their lives uprooted by disaster, they need help both immediately and over the long-term. The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), for example, is one organisation that in partnership with non-government organisations (NGOs) provides food aid in emergency situations. In 2009, the WFP provided over 4,128,000 tonnes of emergency food aid⁴. This figure is for food only, and does not include all the additional materials required in order to actually meet the need of providing food to people living in camps. The logistics to achieve this are immense.

In 1997 an international project was established with the purpose of developing a set of minimum, universal standards in the core areas of humanitarian assistance. The Sphere Project seeks to improve the quality and timeliness of assistance provided to people affected by disasters. These standards include food security, nutrition and food aid, as well as the logistics for providing food, and the equipment required for its use. The overall aim of the Sphere standards is to help alleviate suffering, and assist people affected by disaster to live with dignity⁵.

Notes

> Setting the scene

This scenario was loosely inspired by events in northern Uganda, and the conflict between the Lord's Resistance Army and the Ugandan government.

At the height of the conflict 1.8 million people were internally displaced and living in camps. Today most people have either returned home or resettled elsewhere. However, as at December 2010 an estimated 182,000 people remain living in camps⁶.

Option: Schools in NSW may wish to visit the World Vision Connecting Lives exhibit in Sydney – the exhibit takes people through the true stories of three children living in poverty. One of the children, Innocent, was forced to leave her village in Uganda with her mother and two sisters due to the conflict. They lived in a camp for many years. The exhibit uses audio and photos to share some of Innocent and her family's experiences.

> Arriving at the camp

Student answers at this stage are likely to be fairly broad and non-specific. For example: "food" without specifying what type of food, or how much, or food-related requirements, such as cooking and eating utensils, storage containers, fuel for

a fire to cook over, etc – this detail will be drawn out during the next stage of the activity.

Important, high-level requirements are likely to include some variant of:

- A way to reunite with family, friends, other people from the same village
- Security/protection from the conflict
- Shelter / a home / accommodation
- Food
- Water
- Sanitation and hygiene facilities
- Healthcare, including psychological support
- Replacement items/equipment such as clothing, bedding, household items and so on
- Opportunities to earn an income/livelihood/something to do during the day for adults and children, for example: school; safe play spaces; training; work activities around the camp
- Eventually, once the emergency situation is over, support in returning home or resettling elsewhere

Organisations establishing/supporting camps must think through the detail of all of these requirements, also keeping in mind that most camps have several thousand people living in them, who may be living there for months or even years.

> Going deeper

The types of items people living in camps require, in order to fulfill the need for 'food', can include:

Access to food

- Ration card, or some means of ensuring they receive their fair/equitable share of food
- A means of ensuring vulnerable people (children, women, elderly, disabled, and people suffering from HIV and AIDS) are given priority access
- Information about when, where, how to receive food
- Sacks or some means of carrying food
- If food is provided in cans or containers, some means of opening the cans or containers

Storing food

- Shelter large enough to include a space for storing food, preferably off the floor
- Containers for storing food, ideally that will prevent spoilage from weather or animals

Cooking food

- A cooking space either within or just outside the shelter
- Fuel for heating food, for example: wood and a means of igniting a fire

- Materials, such as clay, for making a simple oven, or some means of suspending pots over a fire, and safely removing them
- Equipment for portioning ingredients, cooking spoons, mortar and pestle for pounding grains, pots, and so forth
- Water both for cooking with, for cleaning cooking equipment, and for keeping hands clean/hygienic while handling food

Eating

- Bowls and spoons for serving food
- Plates, bowls, cups and implements for eating food
- Water to drink, for cleaning eating equipment, and for cleaning hands and face after eating

Disposal

- Sanitation facilities/toilets for disposal of human waste
- A rubbish dump for disposal of spoiled food, and un-reusable food storage and cooking materials, located away from the camp for hygiene (may need a means of carrying to the rubbish dump). As refugees typically have few to no possessions, however, every effort is made to re-use materials wherever possible. For example, in some camps grain sacks from food aid distribution are re-used to provide insulation for shelters.

Note: In some camps, it is possible for people to grow their own food to supplement their rations. The challenge with this depends first on the environment being arable land, and to be sustainable, in particular for large camps with tens of thousands of people. Secondly, people will need seeds, equipment and sufficient water for farming. If refugees have livestock with them, or livestock is provided to them, the needs of the animals, in particular for feed and water, will also need to be considered. Additionally, not all people in the camp will have a background in agriculture, and so will, initially, lack the skills and knowledge to successfully grow their own food, thus requiring training. If crops can be grown, it will take time until they are ready to be harvested, and it may not be possible to grow sufficient quantities or variety to meet the standards for human health, resulting in an on-going need for food supplies to be provided.

Note: Water is a re-occurring item with regards to providing 'food'. Clean water for cooking and drinking needs to be considered as an integral part of any provision of food aid.

¹ The Sphere Project, Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response, 2004, pg 189-91

² Source: World Vision Get Connected Issue 8 – Migration: People on the move, pg 28

³ Source: <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/4a0174156.html> [accessed 10 Mar 11]

⁴ Source: <http://www.wfp.org/fais/reports/quantities-delivered-two-dimensional-report/run/year/2009/cat/Emergency/recipient/All/donor/All/code/All/mode/All/basis/0/ order/0/> [accessed 10 Mar 11]

⁵ The Sphere Project, Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response, 2004, pg 2 and 5

⁶ Source: <http://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/Uganda> [accessed: 10 Mar 11]