

UGANDA: SUDANESE REFUGEES

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The increasing levels of insecurity in northern Uganda as rebel groups attack civilian and military targets forced the government in March to decide to move all the remaining 27,000 Sudanese refugees living in the three Red Cross camps in Koboko to safer locations further inside the country. This has changed the long-term future of Red Cross operations in northern Uganda, as previously only Gbenge was due to close, leaving Adranga and Waju as proposed settlement camps. It is expected that these transfers will be completed by the end of the year, transforming the Red Cross operation into a 'closing down' programme. However, until Adranga and Waju camps finally close their doors, the Uganda Red Cross Society (URCS) and the Federation's responsibilities will increase, because in May they are scheduled to take over the running of the camps' health facilities from MSF (Holland).

The context

Since August 1993, an estimated 129,000 Sudanese refugees have fled into the Koboko area of northern Uganda due to the conflict between the Sudanese government and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). At the end of 1995, the Uganda Red Cross Society (URCS) and Federation were providing camp management, food and non-food distributions, water, sanitation, social services, education, construction and environmental care to 51,000 refugees in three camps: Gbenge, which was scheduled for closure with its 26,000 population being moved to another camp further inland; Waju (12,000) and Adranga (15,000). The transfer of refugees from Gbenge to the camp in Ikafe started in late November 1995 and was scheduled for completion at the end of April 1996. Meanwhile in March, the Ugandan government announced that Adranga and Waju camps would not become settlement camps, as thought earlier, but would also be relocated further away from the border. UNHCR therefore expects all Sudanese refugees presently living in Koboko to be transferred to the inland settlements at Ikafe and Mvepi by the end of 1996.

Latest events

Insecurity in northern Uganda greatly increased in the first three months of 1996, culminating in an 8 March ambush on the Karuma-Pakwach road (the major supply route for the West Nile region) by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebels which killed over 100 people. This was only the most horrific of a series of recent attacks by the LRA, although so far they have not directly affected the Koboko operational area. Nevertheless, security measures have been tightened within the Federation's Koboko sub-delegation and a satellite phone was installed in early March to ensure improved communications with Kampala and the outside world.

Further conflict, this time on 12 February between government troops and West Nile Bank Front rebels forced an already displaced population of Ugandans at Monodu to flee further inland. The number of displaced persons in northern Uganda (especially the Gulu and Koboko areas) has since then become an important issue. ICRC, together with the Uganda Red Cross Society, carried out a field assessment and found displaced population figures of 20,000 in Gulu district and 10,000 in Koboko.

The Ugandan government, through its local district and country councils, has supplied emergency relief items to the displaced population. The URCS/Federation in Koboko provided emergency logistical support covering first aid, shelter, transport, and water/sanitation needs, as well as assistance to the local government in registration and relief distribution. ICRC is assisting the displaced in the Gulu area. Close co-ordination between the URCS/Federation and the ICRC on the provision of assistance in the Koboko area is also taking place. Meanwhile, the Ugandan government is evaluating the possibility of moving the displaced further inland from the border, where they can be given agricultural implements for at least mid-term self reliance.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Population •

The transfer of Sudanese refugees from the Red Cross Gbenge camp to Ikafe and Mvepi camps resumed on 11 March but was halted again on 15 March due to a lack of plastic sheeting. A total of 1,111 families (3,051 individuals) were transferred over these four days and the camp is scheduled to be completely empty by the end of April. The trend in camp populations since the beginning of the year has been as follows:

	January	March
Gbenge	13,033	6,754
Waju	11,249	11,422
Adranga	15,397	15,705
Total	39,679	33,881

Relief Distributions •

The food supply pipeline has been slow and inadequate in the first three months of the year. Delays in delivery have halted the distribution of a full ration of various food items (see table) and half-rations were issued throughout March comprising grain (7.5 kg), beans (0.9 kg), vegetable oil (0.3 kg) and salt (0.075 kg). Extra salt supplies were finally received and distributed but cereal stocks remained limited. Distributions in the first quarter were:

(mt)	Sorghum	M/Meal	M/grains	Beans	Veg. Oil	Salt	Sugar
Gbenge	312.65	13.33	135.99	53.7	17.94	4.46	0.66
Waju	328.77	216	171.78	51.18	17.06	4.25	1.71
Adranga	133.79	—	235.86	57.91	19.56	4.81	0.75
Other	—	2.57	—	1.19	0.36	0.1	—
Total	775.21	231.9	543.63	163.98	54.92	13.62	3.12

Non-food items distributed between January-March were made up of soap (38,112 bars), saucepans (21,180), plastic plates (39,295), plastic cups (42,904), plastic basins (11,931), plus exercise books (795) and pens (2,173) to pupils in the refugee schools. The bulk of the plastic household items were from a badly-needed and

highly-appreciated British Red Cross donation of non-food items. Hoes, rakes and pick axes were also distributed to the camps to facilitate the construction of extra sanitation facilities.

Water/Sanitation •

Water activities continued as usual, including tanking, water treatment, the repair and maintenance of boreholes, the protection of springs and wells, and the chlorinating of water.

- Three new boreholes were sunk in Waju and Adranga camps by the Red Cross with assistance from Care International. This has considerably improved the water situation in the camps during the dry season.
- A new spring was protected at Waju camp.
- Water tanking served the Gbenge and Koboko NGO compounds, Adranga III primary school, plus Waju and Adranga health clinics.
- Two hundred wooden pit latrine covers were made for Waju and Adranga camps. Through home visits, the refugee community is being encouraged to construct sanitary facilities for themselves, given health and sanitation education and mobilised to keep water sources clean.

Education •

During the school holidays in January, teachers of the Koboko programme attended a workshop where they were trained in examination techniques and the primary school curriculum. First Term pupil registrations showed a high population in the primary schools (9,049 pupils in five schools) with 156 teachers at work in both primary and nursery schools (124 refugees and 31 Ugandans). Further training for 146 primary school teachers took place in March.

An extension of 19 classrooms in five local schools was completed as planned. Scholastic materials of all kinds were distributed to refugee schools as well as over 4,000 text books. Nursery schools also received some sugar (616 kg) and posho (900 kg) for their pupil 'feeding programme'.

Community Development •

Forty-four participants from the relief, social services, logistics and engineering departments attended a three-day workshop organised by the social services/education department in Koboko on 'How to Improve Working Together.'

The community development department in Koboko ran tailoring and carpentry workshops for 64 refugees in the first quarter of 1996. Women's groups trained in pottery and weaving, and both locals and refugees also received instruction as tin smiths so that they can construct multi-fuel stoves which can burn grass. The demonstration garden in Waju was handed over to three community groups for cultivation. The groups will be assisted with seeds and tools. The demonstration garden in Adranga camp will also be handed over soon.

Health •

A three-person URCS/Federation health assessment team visited the Koboko operations in January to evaluate the implications involved in a takeover later this year by the Red Cross of all the health services in the Koboko camps from MSF (Holland). This handover is likely to take place sometime in May, once a Federation health delegate is in place and funding is secured by UNHCR. The health activities presently undertaken by MSF (Holland) include health clinics, EPI, MCH, laboratory, feeding programmes, screening and vaccination of new arrivals, and ambulance services. An average of 11,400 out-patient consultations a month are conducted by the three Koboko clinics, as

well as 5,908 vaccinations.

Logistics •

The logistics department of the URCS/Federation in Koboko improved the operation's procurement/logistics system through the holding of workshops on store-keeping, driving and security. These workshops also served as part of the internal 'capacity building' of the URCS by the Federation. The Federation's proposed system of procurement and distribution was adopted by the National Society so at the beginning of April the logistics delegate — who had been based in Koboko — was moved to Kampala to improve the logistics/procurement system in the headquarters.

Construction •

- Routine maintenance and repairs were carried out on access roads, warehouse compounds, camp offices, distribution centres, and social centres.
- The construction of tukuls (huts) for vulnerable groups continued with 43 being completed as well as 68 latrines in Adranga and Waju camps.
- Five native primary schools with refugee pupils have now been roofed. The permanent primary school in Adranga III is still under construction, whilst a kitchen was built for Waju I nursery school.
- The access road between Adranga II and III was re-graded and culverts installed where necessary. The Red Cross also assisted the town board of Koboko to re-grade 2.7 km of roads which are heavily used by Red Cross traffic.

Afforestation •

There were no plantings between January and March due to the rainy season, though the preparation of seed beds and potting was very active in all the seed-bed sites, where 36,824 seedlings of various species were pricked. The URCS afforestation officer in Koboko attended a four-day UNHCR workshop on environmental planning and energy conservation in March. Ten refugee women were also trained in Koboko by the community development department as trainers in making improved clay stoves for energy-saving purposes. They are expected to teach other refugee women to make and use the stoves and thereby reduce the levels of deforestation in the areas around the camps.

Tracing / Rehabilitation •

Between January and March, 240 messages were handled by the Red Cross. In addition, around two disabled people per month are being admitted to a local hospital for surgery. A few general mobility appliances (including tricycles, wheelchairs, crutches, walking sticks, etc) continue to be distributed to those in need of them.

Staffing •

The number of established staff remains at about 100 in the Koboko operation, though this will begin to decline in the near future as the operation scales down. The Federation delegation was reduced by two delegates in January and will continue to shrink as greater responsibilities are given to the URCS staff. At the end of May, the delegation will consist of seven delegates.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

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