

## RHC Case Study 3

### **The Sarvo Refugee Influx Part III: *Further Developments at the Ratta Refugee Camps***

The able registration team registered 9,825 persons—20% of whom were under age five. This broke down to 2,162 persons in Site 1, 4,416 in Site 2, and 3,247 persons in Site 3. Of persons over the age of 15 years, 42% were male. While this work was going on, the nutrition team members turned their attention to assessing food and nutritional situations with a view toward strengthening food distribution and dealing with malnutrition present. The following additional information had now become available.

#### **Additional Information**

As a start, you visit the District Commissioner in Ratta who has been coordinating activities to date. He informs you that the food situation among refugees has seemed precarious. He does not believe that adequate food has been reaching the refugees. By now he believes that what food the refugees brought with them has been consumed. Refugees have been working in the gardens of Ratta villagers in exchange for food. Some of the cattle brought by the refugees are now being sold off. On one hand, this has reduced complaints from Ratta village that the cattle have been destroying gardens, but it has also depressed the market price of cattle. The dry season, which is just beginning, is the traditional time for marriages in this part of Kovali. He is worried that the bride price, which is traditionally set in numbers of cattle, will be adversely affected.

Isaac Mtunzi, the medical assistant working in the makeshift clinic in the Anglican church, says he has been seeing a lot of kwashiorkor recently. He associates some of it with an increasing number of malaria cases among the refugees. He says there is more marasmus than he has seen elsewhere. He tells the mothers what they should be feeding their children, but mothers reply that they can't get these foods. There seems to him to be more children with malnutrition coming from the far end of Site 2 and along the railway line in Site 1, where many of the most recent arrivals have settled. Adults, he thinks, are considerably thinner than local residents, but he hasn't compared weights because he has only a UNICEF hanging scale. Many of the deaths among children, he thinks, are complicated by malnutrition, even if undernutrition is not the immediate cause of death.

The nursing sister at the clinic, Florence Chisale, says she has been distributing packets of dried skim milk to mothers of the most severely malnourished. In response to your question, she says she does not know if the children actually get the milk. Yes, she has seen some of the packets for sale in the Ratta market. She is frustrated by the traditional beliefs of refugee mothers that food should be withheld from sick children. She feels that this is contributing to the high death rates among children. Many mothers, she thinks, are too busy or too weak to bring their children to the clinic for treatment.

The manger of the Kovali Muslim Relief Organization (KMRO), Iqbal Nurmahomed, is visiting Ratta village to arrange the next distribution of food. He states that his organization has received various donations of food from the local World Food Programme warehouse in Tataba and from various Muslim businessmen. The Ministry of Agriculture has also donated food at various times. Mainly, KMRO has been distributing cassava and maize. Most of the times there have been some beans to supply, and, sometimes, small amounts rice. For the past two months, tins of cooking oil from USAID have been available. He is sure that there is enough maize, the staple food in this area, available to last another month. Beyond that, he thinks the country will need extra food from outside, especially if more people come. If the orders are placed soon, perhaps it can come by ship through Port Fanwell. Otherwise, it may be necessary to fly it

into Tataba. The KMRO has been using an empty warehouse in Oketo town as a forward supply depot, receiving shipments from Tataba by train. Recently, there has been some thefts from the warehouse. He suspects the Sarvoland Patriotic Front or maybe off-duty police from Oketo garrison. He is also angry at the local truck drivers who continually raise rates they charge for moving food to the camps, and who he suspects of diverting some food stuffs.

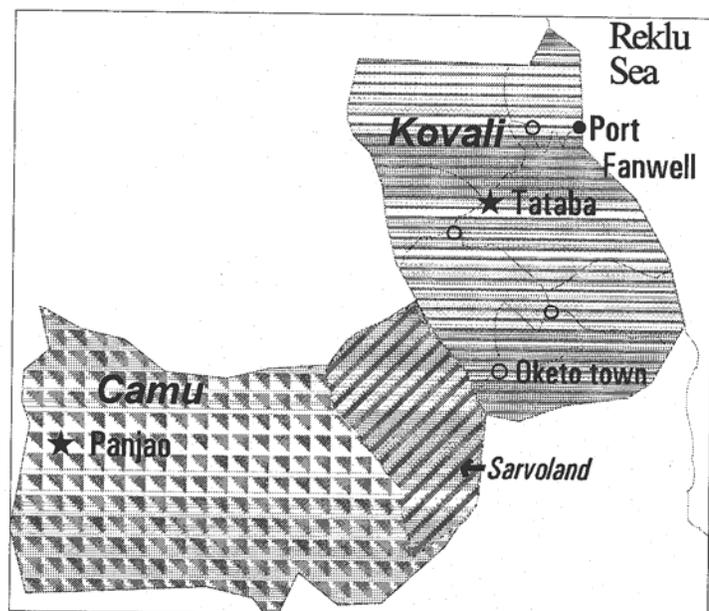
He says that because his organization has only a small number of full-time staff, it has relied heavily on refugees to distribute food. The practice has been to select men from various parts of the camp to distribute food to the households in their areas. These men collect the food from the back of trucks, which drive to one point in each site. He is thinking that soon they will have to carry the sacks of food from the bridge, since the bridge is deteriorating and drivers are starting to refuse to cross it with their trucks.

A walk through the camps with Sister Chisale turned up the following observations:

- ◆ In market areas, bananas and cassava are for sale in fairly large amounts. Also seen were many tins of cooking oil. In smaller amounts were beans and dried fish. No meat was seen, although vendors said that goat meat, pork, and beef were available on Thursdays and Fridays. They did say that amounts sold were usually small. Chickens are usually always available but seem to have been all sold earlier in the morning. The overall size of the market was small compared with that in Ratta village.
- ◆ Walking through the camps, you observed that many houses had cassava laid out on the ground or top of their shelters to dry in the sun. Some cooking of beans and maize was going on. Of houses selected at random, most had some cassava on hand and a small amount of maize and sometimes beans. This seemed inadequate to last until the next distribution of food, which the DC believed KMRO would carry out in another 12 days.
- ◆ Several women approach your group, complaining that they have not been receiving fair portions of the food being distributed. They say some of the food being distributed is going back across the border. Some of the rest is being used to make beer. Beer-making is the traditional role of Sarvo women, and they feel they are being cheated. They also complain they do not like the maize they are getting. It is often full of weevils and they think it is from last year's crop. They were also concerned that they must walk a long way for firewood to use for cooking and for warmth at nights.

You notice that in general these refugees are not as well dressed as people you have seen in the markets at Ratta and Oketo. There are some blankets seen being aired out, but in several of the huts where you randomly stop, no one has a blanket. Most families have a cooking pot, but many look heavily worn. Water is being stored in open buckets or clay pots.

As you return to the Ratta Town Hall, where the DC has generously given you an office, a messenger from the post office arrives with a fax from the Canadian High Commission in Tataba. The High Commissioner says that two C-130 Hercules aircraft on loan to CIDA from the Canadian Air Force to assist relief effort in a nearby country could be available for a short period of time next week to move food into Koval, before they are scheduled to return to Canada. You need to confirm within 48 hours.



Across the road from the town hall is the Ratta railway station. On enquiry, the station master says that a freight train originating in Port Fanwell and passing through Tataba goes through Ratta twice weekly heading for the interchange with the Camu National Railways (CNR) at the border. He says that since last year when heavy rains weakened the bridges north of Oketo, freight cars have been limited to a capacity of 20 MT (metric tons) each. With the new GE locomotives supplied through USAID, a train can now consist of up to 60 freight cars.

While you are staying at the Oketo District Council Rest House, you are visited by Mr. Ivan Ogbutu, who owns the trucking company, which has been transporting much of the food for the KMRO from the Oketo depot to the Ratta distribution point. He denies allegations of diversion of foodstuffs and says these are malicious rumors circulated by his competitors. He and his brother are ready to offer you an exclusive contract for transport of all commodities at a very attractive price.

- ◆ At Oketo, you visit the airstrip and speak to the Civil Aviation Authority officer in charge, a Mr. Tsaka. He informs you that the dirt runway is 3000m in length. Since this is the cold season, with daytime maximum temperatures about 14 degrees, heavily laden cargo planes should be able to land without problem. You observe there are no fueling facilities and the space for unloading aircraft is limited from the forests to the camps.