

Humanitarian aid for refugees



Background Briefs
Development issues and efforts

Conflicts between and within countries have always been a part of history. As armies clash, civilian populations suffer. Sometimes invading armies intentionally force people from their homes. Other times, people flee as armies advance. These people may seek refuge in other areas of their own country or in a neighbouring country.

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are people who seek safety in another area of their own country. Not all IDPs flee because of war. When drought or disaster strikes in one part of a country, residents may move to other areas to find food and shelter. Today there are hundreds of thousands of IDPs in various parts of the world.

During the past century, thousands of refugees have fled their homes in such places as Afghanistan, the Darfur region of Sudan, Bosnia and Ethiopia, looking for safety elsewhere. Receiving countries face

enormous problems trying to deal with the sudden influx of tens, or even hundreds, of thousands of people. The refugees often have no shelter, clean water or food and their safety may be threatened from within as well as outside of the group. The majority of refugees are often women and children. Without help, many refugees would die of starvation or disease.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as CARE Canada, UNICEF, Oxfam, CAUSE Canada, the UN's World Food Programme and the Red Cross-Red Crescent Society provide humanitarian aid to refugees. Canadians, through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), provide financial support to these and other NGOs.

In the 1980s thousands of Ethiopian refugees fled to neighbouring Somalia to escape fighting in their

own country. Several years later, fighting broke out in Somalia as well. The Ethiopian refugees returned home even though fighting was still going on in Ethiopia. However, the refugees no longer had homes and were forced to live in makeshift camps. The Ethiopians were joined in the camps by thousands of Somalians who were fleeing from the war in their own country. One refugee camp of more than 20 000 people was located near a very small town that did not have the resources to help the people. The Ethiopian government had drained government resources that could have helped the victims. As well, it was reluctant to give the UN or other aid agencies full authority to deal with the situation. After the government fell, a successful UN-World Food Bank airlift brought provisions to the camp. Three hours away, 15 000 people settled in camps next to UN peacekeepers. UNICEF and various NGOs made certain the people in the camps had at least the minimum supplies for survival. UNICEF supplied plastic sheeting for shelters and high protein biscuits. German Agro Action distributed buckets, blankets and cooking sets

purchased with funds donated by CIDA.

As well as war, drought has uprooted almost four million Afghans. For decades there have been refugee camps and shanty camps along Afghanistan's borders with neighbouring countries. There are also refugee camps inside Afghanistan for a million IDPs. There is little food and medical assistance is scarce. To make matters worse, fighting makes it almost impossible to deliver food supplies to some areas. About 10 000 families in Takhar province faced starvation until Foodgrains Bank and its Canadian partners shipped 2400 tonnes of wheat, 217 tonnes of edible oil and 860 tonnes of beans. CIDA financially supported the six-month project.

