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Ranking in planning of emergency programme in Angola

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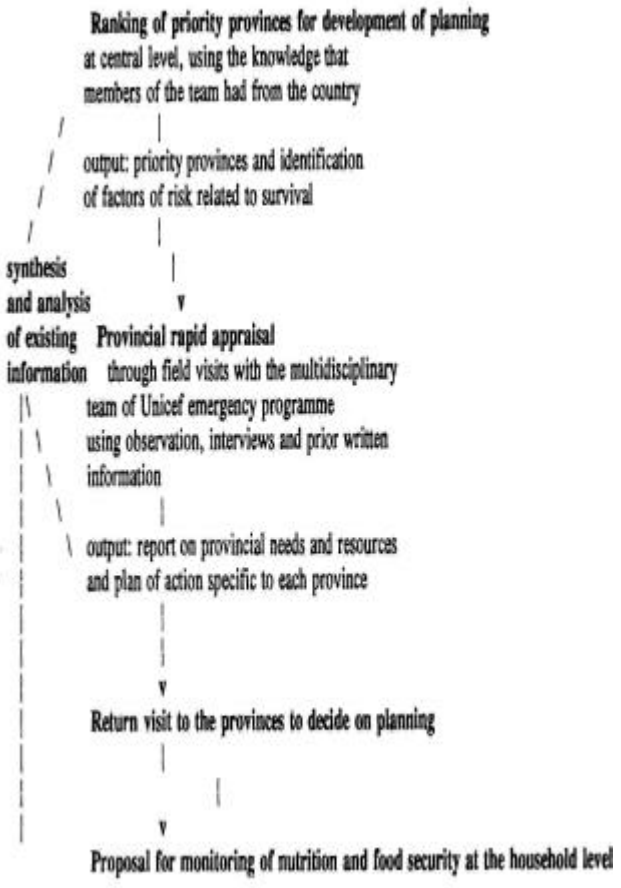
· Introduction

This paper reports a ranking exercise carried out by a UNICEF technical team (a medical doctor, an agronomist and a nutritionist) in Angola. This exercise was part of the planning of the UNICEF relief programme within the UN 'Special Emergency Programme for Angola' (SRPA) launched in October 1991. It took place from December 1991 to June 1992. The author was involved as a nutritionist. The present paper focuses on the methodology itself rather than the impact of the exercise on the decision-making process because the departure of the author before completion of the programme, and because the failure of the peace process prevented any follow up. However, looking at this experience with critical eyes might be useful in planning emergency programmes under the pressure of time and resource constraints.

The author's views do not necessarily represent those of UNICEF. Any faults or misconception in the interpretation of the fieldwork remain the author's own responsibility.

Ranking is defined here as a process of priority ordering, in this case of administrative areas in relation to the need for assistance. It used the knowledge that informants possessed from the country (at a national level) and from the provinces (at provincial level). No quantitative data were used. Whereas data were available from various sources including national statistics, the controversy about their reliability was often solved by looking for/gathering more data and thus increasing the complexity of the data analysis. The methodology used was inspired from the 'Rapid Rural Appraisal' approach[1]. The ranking technique was expected to provide a rational framework to deal with time and resource constraints (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Sequence of the need assessment



[1] Grandin B.E. 1988. *Wealth ranking in Smallholder Communities: a Field Manual*. Intermediate Technology Publications.

Source: RRA Notes (1993), Issue 17, pp.29–33, IIED London

· Ranking exercise at central level

This exercise aimed to identify priority provinces for the UNICEF emergency programme from the 9 targeted by the SRPA. The informants were the members of the UNICEF technical team: one was from the country and another had been working there for more than one year. Each member was qualified in complementary sectors: agriculture, health and nutrition.

From a group discussion, 3 criteria were identified to determine the grade of priority of assistance:

- the magnitude of the risk from the point of view of health and food security, to which contributed various factors such as the intensity of the war conflict, the size of the displaced and refugee populations, the impact of the drought and the size of the population of the province;
- the availability of previous information at the national level on local resources and emergency needs; and,
- the feasibility of intervention which depended on the presence of NGOs and the local administrative capability in handling relief operation, and the condition of the infrastructure.

We assumed that priority became higher as the risk increased, logistics became more difficult, information became more scare and other relief programmes became less active.

The *first step was to establish a score of global risk* for each province, based on the severity of the various factors contributing to it (see Table 1). The score was calculated by pooling together the estimated severity of each of the risk factor.

The *second step was to calculate a global score*, adding the 3 criteria: the higher the score, the greater the priority. The conditions for intervention (c) were taken into account because UNICEF intervention was supposed to be complementary to that of other agencies and organisations. Because UNICEF had access to specific logistic resources, provinces of difficult access and/or provinces with little outside support would be given priority.

Based on this ranking exercise, visits to 5 priority provinces (Huambo, Moxico, Bie, Benguela and Kwanza Sul) were planned. Later, when information gathered by other organisations began to be pooled together, this quick classification of priorities was confirmed.

Table 1. Risk ranking

Province	war	displaced population	refugees	drought impact	population size	TOTAL
Benguela	++	+++	0	++	+++	10
Bie	+++	++	0	0	++	7
Cuando Cubango	+	++	0	+	+	5
Kwanza Sul	++	++	0	++	++	
Cunene	0	+	0	+	+	3
Huambo	+++	++	0	++	+++	10
Huila	+	+	0	++	++	6
Moxico	++	++	++	0	+	7
Namibe	0	+	0	+	+	3

0 = absence of the factor, + to +++ as the magnitude of the factor increases

Source: RRA Notes (1993), Issue 17, pp.29–33, IIED London

Table 2. Priority ranking

Province	risk intensity (a)	absence of information (b)	difficulty of intervention (c)	Total (d)
Benguela	10	+	++	13
Bie	7	+++	+++	13
Cuando Cubango	5	+	+++	9
Kwanza Sul	8	++	+	11
Cunene	3	+	+	5
Huambo	10	+++	+++	16
Huila	6	0	+	7
Namibe	3	+	+	5
Moxico	7	+++	+++	13

· Ranking exercise at provincial level

In 3 provinces among the 5 visited by the UNICEF team, a ranking exercise was carried out with the aim of identifying priority districts for assistance and support to local services. There were a number of reasons for carrying out such an exercise:

- cross-checking the ranking of areas drawn from quantitative data with the one obtained by interviewing a number of provincial informants;
- getting a better understanding of how priorities were defined at provincial level. Ranking was performed without predefined criteria in order to find out which criteria local people were using; and,
- taking into consideration the different perceptions of priority among the main provincial government services.

Unlike the national-level ranking of the provinces, the informants were all based in the province concerned.

The ranking exercise took place in several steps. The first step was a ranking of the districts by priority for assistance which was performed independently by each of the provincial directorates (health, agriculture, social services). Technical staff were involved as well as the provincial directors in order that views of those with more contact with rural areas be included. When several persons from the same directorate were involved, their individual classifications were pooled together and a score calculated.

The second step consisted of pooling together the classifications done by the various directorates and calculating a global score. The higher the score, the higher the priority.

Finally, this ranking based on local informants was compared with those obtained using specific risk criteria such as: the scale of migration due to the war as estimated by the official data on displaced people; the risk of drought based on the locally perceived rainfall pattern; or the conditions for intervention based on access and availability of partners locally. For only one district in one province was the ranking obtained from local informants the same as that obtained from specific criteria.

· Limitations and potential of the approach

At both the central and the provincial levels, the ranking procedures followed had various defects.

In the central level ranking, there was some overlap among the criteria used for ranking. Furthermore, all criteria were given the same weight whereas their impact on people's survival and consequences for assistance were of different severity. Introducing logistics as

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one of the priority criteria created some confusion. According to humanitarian concepts, isolated populations are a priority whereas cost-effectiveness would lead to prioritising areas of easier access and with already some relief organisations. Finally, a bias was introduced by assessing the impact of drought according to the agricultural potential. Therefore semi-arid provinces such as Cunene and Namibe had been attributed a low score for this factor while in these provinces the consequences of drought could also have been assessed from the point of view of the pastoral activity.

The provincial level ranking exercise had no operational outcome for the following reasons. The exercise was not done systematically and was subject to biases because of the lack of diversity of background of the provincial informants. Also foreign agencies showed a lack of faith in the ranking performed by provincial authorities. Third, the concept of priority as used in the ranking did not allow to take into account the diversity of needs within a province.

However a number of outcomes for both the central and provincial level rankings are worth considering. First, the ranking process at the central level provided, in the absence of organised data, a framework to target relief which was independent of quantitative data, thus avoiding the perpetuation of the controversy about the reliability of identification and counting of 'affected people'. Second, outsiders and donors began to be aware of the variability and diversity of the emergency situation throughout the country, thus introducing the concept of province-specific intervention planning.

The provincial level ranking exercise serves to underline a number of points. First, priority as defined by displaced population data, which had been used by the UN agencies, had little in common with the perceived priority at provincial level. It might be that local informants had a better knowledge of the distribution of displaced people but also that other factors such as the local capability to deal with relief work and the severity of the impact of drought were taken into consideration. For instance, in one province, 4 among 7 districts were attributed the same rank by local informants and by using qualitative information on rainfalls. The provincial level exercise also emphasized the risk of errors in deciding priorities based only on one source of information.

· Conclusions

A ranking process can be a very powerful mechanism for international agencies. It provides a guideline for better management of time and technical resources. In the case of Angola, it was useful for outlining the complexity of the humanitarian issues to which UN agencies had tended to answer with a standardized and predefined set of strategies. However the efficiency of this process depends on the choice of informants. The success of this exercise at national level was mainly due to the multidisciplinary approach and to the knowledge that staff members had of the field conditions. Ranking could be also a very useful approach for the identification of perceived priority at the local level. In the Angolan context, it could have been a helpful vehicle for organising local knowledge and improving ability in managing resources and problems at the local level, given that monitoring systems and official information systems had a limited coverage and encountered many technical difficulties.

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