

# The applications of technical support in UNHCR



UNHCR/A Hollman

Mozambican refugees in Malawi

## **Chapter Learning Objectives**

*In this chapter you will learn*

- *what the Technical Support Service is*
- *what the basic tasks of TSS are*
- *the relevance TSS may have to your work*
- *what other technical resources are available and how to use them*

## ***Introduction***

By now we have an idea of what technical support is all about—when it's needed and where it applies. Let's now look more closely at the practical applications. What should you do if you need technical support? What structure does technical support have within UNHCR? How can you have access to it?

## **Technical Support Service (TSS) — What it is**

In this chapter we shall be looking in some detail at the work and functioning of TSS. We shall see that its tasks are extremely diverse, and reflect the multi-sectoral approach to assistance as described in Chapter 1. TSS may be asked one day to help co-ordinate planning for a new rural settlement scheme for 50,000 refugees—the next, to ensure liaison between two Field Offices for the medical evacuation and treatment of a single refugee. This diversity is an essential aspect of its work.

### **How does TSS fit within UNHCR's structure?**

TSS is one of the Material Support Services of UNHCR (along with Programme Management, Supplies and Food Aid and Resettlement). It is directly responsible to the Deputy High Commissioner.

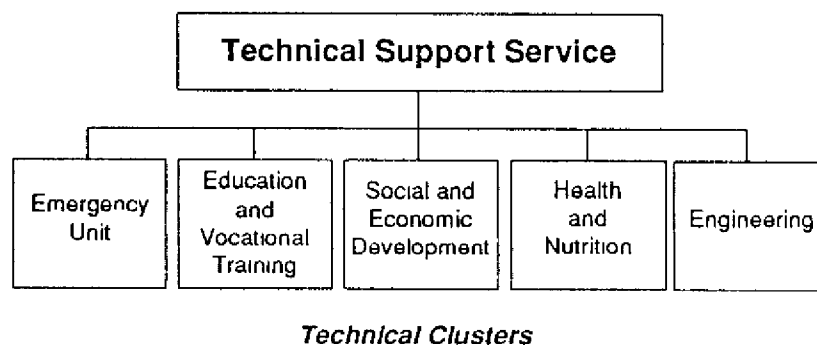
### ***A brief history of TSS***

A Specialist Support Unit was first created within UNHCR in the early 1980's, at a time when assistance activities had grown to a new dimension. This Unit focused on rural settlements (socio-economic planning, water supply, and physical planning components). These functions were subsequently taken over by TSS, as well as those of Social Services and the Emergency Unit.

### **What departments does it have?**

The figure on the following page shows you the organizational structure of TSS. You will see that it consists of five inter-related technical clusters.

## Technical support service



### What does it do?

TSS' overall *purpose* can be defined as follows:

to support refugees in maintaining their human dignity, restoring normal conditions and quality of life and achieving long-term solutions.

Its *goals* are therefore:

to help plan and design cost-effective projects, and to improve their efficiency through multi-sectoral, technical expertise.



TSS' *terms of reference* — or essential tasks — can be summarized as follows:

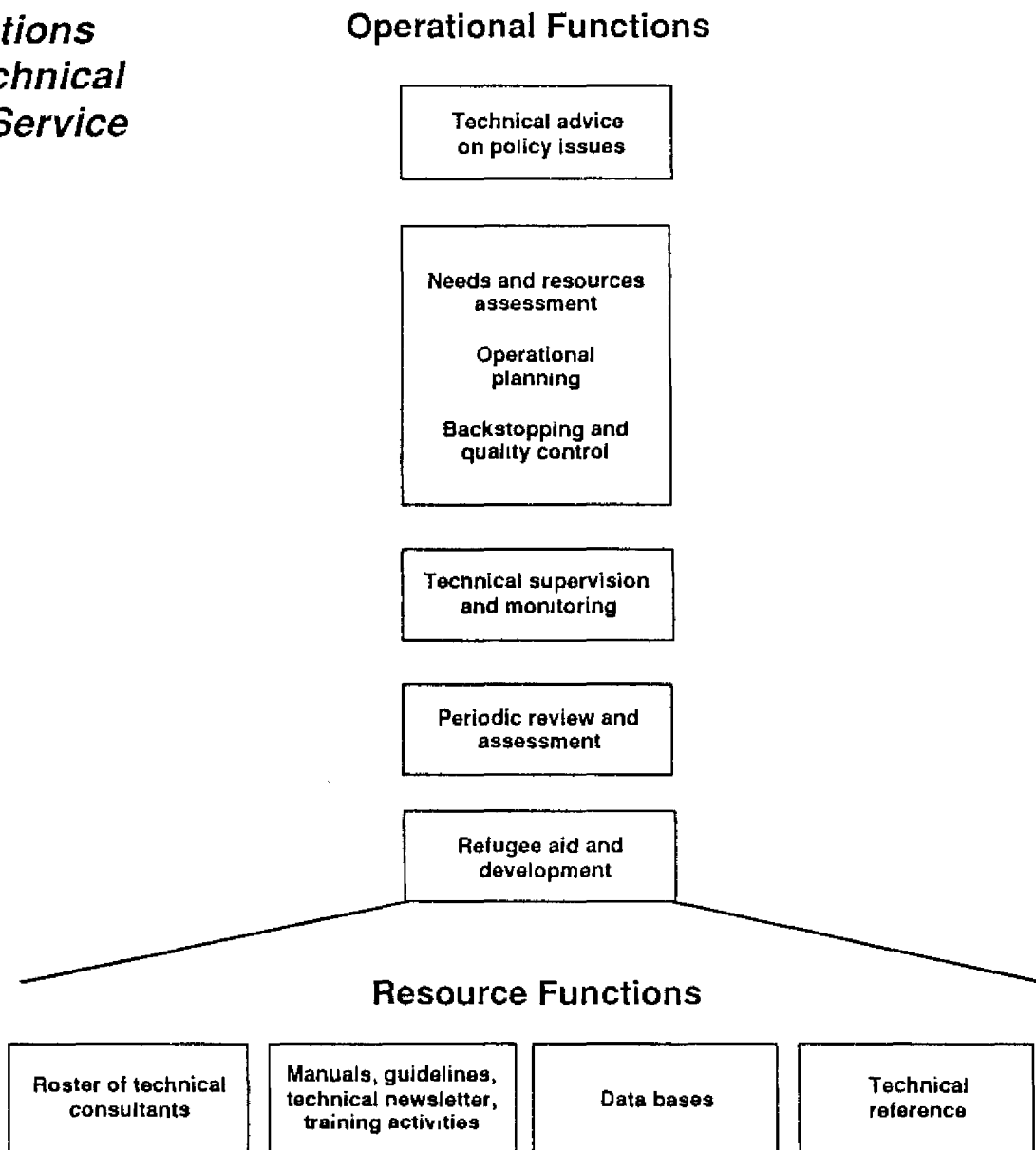
1. Needs and resources assessment in emergency and returnee situations.
2. Specialized inputs in projects promoting refugee self-sufficiency.
3. Refugee aid and development.
4. Guidelines, manuals and systems.
5. Training materials and activities.

The figure on the following page shows the types of functions performed by TSS. You will see that they fall into two categories.

**Operational functions**, designed to improve UNHCR's effectiveness and ensure quality assistance. The assessment of needs, planning of operations, supervision and monitoring of implementation, review and correction of programmes are all essential tasks for this purpose.

**Resource functions**, which serve to support the operational functions. The production of guidelines, manuals and activities of a similar nature are described in greater detail in this chapter.

**The Functions  
of the Technical  
Support Service  
(TSS)**

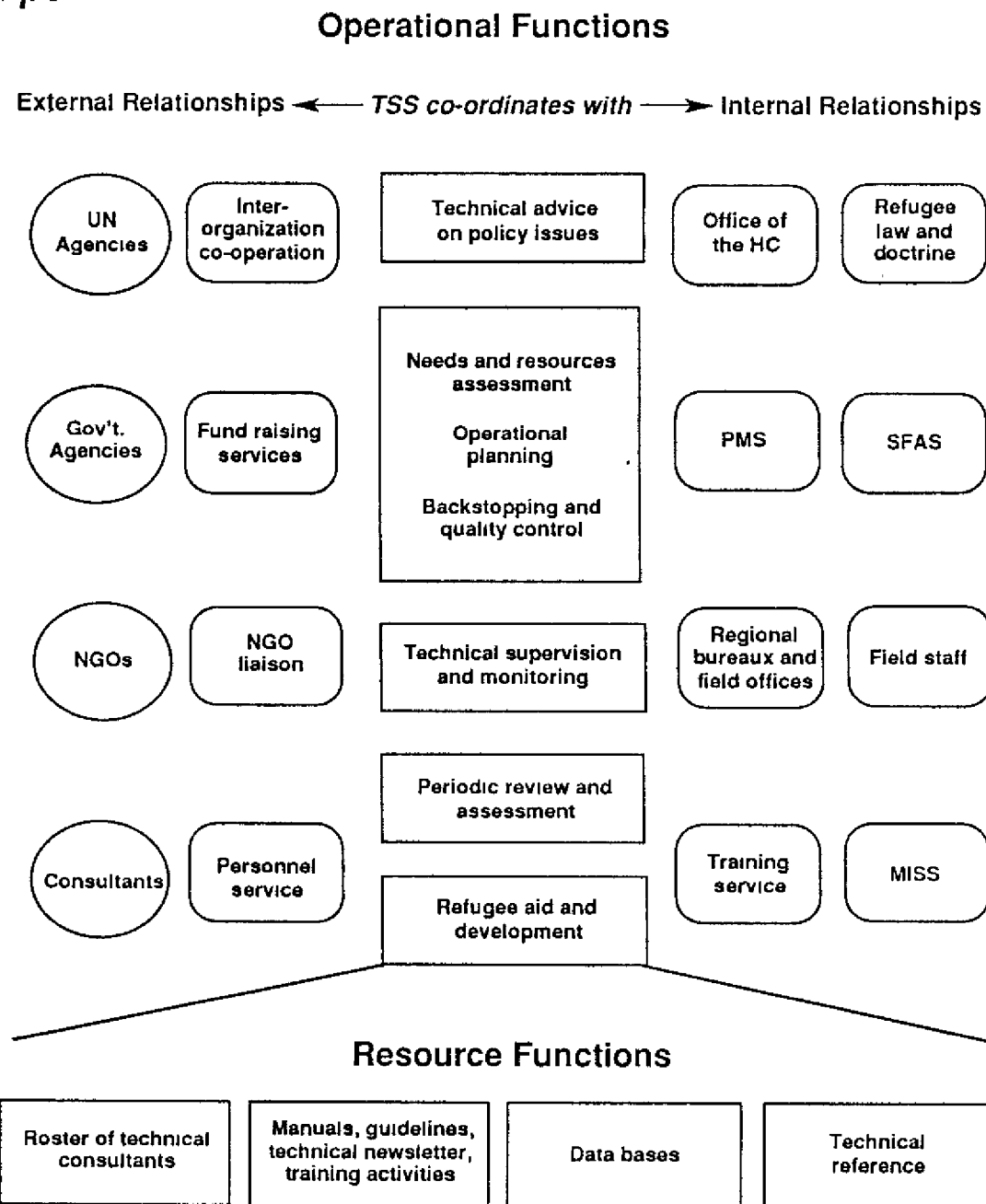


Co-ordination is a major aspect of these functions—both inside and outside UNHCR. Look carefully at the figure on the next page. It shows the lines of co-ordination which have to be maintained.

**TSS in the field**

It is important for you to know that the TSS Headquarters expertise is complemented by a network of technical field staff. Their specialities cover the whole spectrum of TSS activities.

## TSS Functions and Relationships



They are mainly located in countries with large refugee populations (Pakistan, Sudan, Ethiopia, Malawi). Some hold regional responsibilities. This is especially the case of social services officers. An up-to-date list of these officers can be obtained at any time from TSS. Make sure that you have it if you are working in a multi-disciplinary team at a field office.

## How can TSS' expertise be useful to you?

In this section you will find a brief description of the basic tasks of each TSS unit, and what specific relevance they may have to your own work.

### Emergency preparedness and response

These activities have been referred to in Chapter 2. The basic principles which guide this work can be summarized as follows.

- Contingency planning, emergency alert systems and training are essential elements of efficiency
- Emergency needs must be given priority over on-going work.
- Measures to meet immediate needs must be accompanied by plans for long-term improvements and prevention of problems.
- Refugees must be involved at an early stage, with immediate plans to encourage self-sufficiency.
- Wherever feasible, plans for durable solutions must be factored in from the start.



The following list is one set of examples that TSS can do for you in operational terms.

- assess needs in terms of emergency response, devise an operations plan or define the "lessons learned"
- establish emergency alert systems
- improve a contingency plan
- have access to additional resources (emergency staffing, stockpile)
- distribute emergency field kits (food locker containing basic survival items such as sleeping bag, blanket, tent, food and water purification system)

## Education

The right to education is recognized as a basic human right. In the case of refugees its importance is fundamental as a safeguard for the future. Within UNHCR's programmes, educational assistance at the level of *primary education* has been the most common. It is provided on the same basis as that of nationals of the host country.

At *post-primary level*, education is not limited to academic education, but focuses also on non-formal and vocational training. You should keep in mind what education is not, as well as what it is.



- Education is *not* an end in itself, but rather a means to a longer-term objective.
- Education is developmental, or else it is not viable. That is to say, it must be linked to the refugee's plan for employment and self-sufficiency.

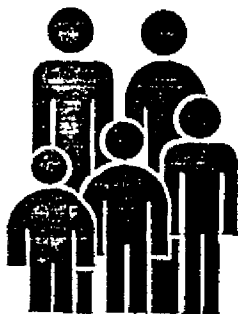
You will find complete information on the scope and character of refugee education in UNHCR in the Guidelines for educational assistance (IOM/56/83 – BOM/52/83) and in the Information Brochure: *UNHCR Scholarship Programme*.



In operational terms, TSS can help you:

- to assess, plan and design new educational/training programmes
- to improve upon existing programmes by advising on curriculum development, teacher training, adult and pre-school education, technical training, language courses, vocational and non-formal education, or other educational activities
- to help administer the formal education sector by providing scholarship assistance up to university level

## Social and economic development



The contributions made by this sector mainly concern viability assessments of various kinds. They cover the following specialities:

- socio-economic and financial analysis
- agronomy and agricultural planning
- income-generating activities
- social planning
- anthropology
- aid and development
- refugee women and children issues
- social services delivery



Specialists in these areas can help you in a whole range of activities, especially project planning, economic and financial analysis, and evaluation focused on durable solutions. What follows are some examples:

- viability studies
- the design of a case management system for urban refugees
- the introduction of a credit scheme in an urban or rural context
- the creation of a registration system in a rural settlement
- an economic/financial appraisal of a project or programme (sectoral or multi-sectoral)
- a survey of social, cultural or economic needs of a given refugee group
- establishment of mechanisms to promote refugee participation
- the design of a viable agricultural plan
- the organization of a training programme for community development workers
- the design and plan development of programmes for vulnerable groups (e.g. disabled, elderly, unaccompanied minors)
- socio-economic impact studies



## Health and nutrition

The objectives in this field are to:

- maintain the refugees' general state of health at the level of the host population
- identify vulnerable groups
- provide preventive care to new arrivals so as to reduce epidemics and mortality
- contain epidemics if they occur
- conduct nutritional surveys
- investigate morbidity and mortality rates
- monitor effectiveness of health relief efforts



In the health and nutrition field, TSS can help you:

- achieve the general objectives listed above
- establish supplementary or therapeutic feeding programmes which might be needed
- design a programme to train medical and nutrition staff, or community health workers
- establish a plan of action for medical and nutrition sectors of given projects

## Engineering



Tasks in this sector mainly concern the physical infrastructure of rural settlements, camps, and areas of spontaneously settled refugees. The goal is to allow refugees to attain living conditions and level of self-sufficiency comparable to that of the local population. In the case of sanitation, there is a close link with the prevention of the spread of disease.

Specialized expertise covers water development, physical planning, sanitation and architecture



Examples of specific areas in which TSS can help you include:

- design of lay-out for a new refugee camp or settlement
- choice of latrine and specifications
- choice between boreholes, shallow wells, hand-dug wells and their location
- plans and design of housing (for refugees or for staff)
- technical specifications on materials and equipment (e.g. water pumps, latrines, housing, vehicles)

## Case Study



### Case C

A Tripartite Agreement has just been signed by representatives from Winken, Blinken, and UNHCR, thereby paving the way for the repatriation of some 75,000 refugees from Blinken who have been granted asylum in Winken. Most of the returnees have been away from their country for many years, and many have lost touch with friends and relatives. Many of the men among the refugees were "freedom fighters", and have been either killed or wounded over the years. Families have been separated, with primary school children studying in a third country, and with secondary and higher education students dispersed in educational programmes around the world. On the more positive side, Winken and the international community have combined efforts to provide excellent health, education, and material assistance to the Blinken refugees.

The Tripartite Agreement allows for repatriation to commence in two months. A transit centre will be required to temporarily house those repatriates who will be travelling by road from a distant refugee settlement en route to the national airport, from which they will return by air to Blinken.



# Questions



## Case Study C

1. *What are some of the social services issues which appear in this case study?*

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2. *Which technical sectors must be addressed in developing the "Operations Plan" for the repatriation?*

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# Analysis



## Case Study C

1. *What are some of the social services issues which appear in this case study?*

- Refugee women and particular needs.
- Refugee children and particular needs.
- Disabled and handicapped refugees.
- Unaccompanied children and orphans.
- Need for considerable family reunification.
- Tracing of family members.
- Refugee participation in facilitating the repatriation.
- Need for a demographic and social-cultural analysis of the refugee population, in planning for repatriation and post-repatriation activities.

2. *Which technical sectors must be addressed in developing the "Operations Plan" for the repatriation?*

- Health care (transit centre, en route)
- Site planning (for the transit centre)
- Sanitation (at the transit centre)
- Logistics and transport (for the entire operation)
- Social services (see 1. above)
- Food and nutrition (transit centre, en route)
- Water (transit centre, en route)
- Education and technical training
- Rural and community development in the post-repatriation context





## Other technical resources and roles

While TSS can provide you with specialized staff, both at Headquarters and in the field, you may need additional resources depending on the circumstances.

### Consultants

The TSS staff with the expertise you need may not be available for an immediate mission. But your need for advice is urgent. A mission of 2-3 weeks or longer is required to draw up the required plans.

The services of a consultant may be called upon. TSS maintains a roster of 500 individual consultants and firms. Most of them are well known to the organization through previous association, and have good knowledge of UNHCR's assistance activities. You should consult TSS for further information on the types of expertise which can be made available through consultancies.

Alternatively, you may be able to find qualified experts locally. The advantage here is their experience of local conditions, government standards and technical complexities.

### *Consultancy contracts*

There are a number of rules which you must know concerning consultancy contracts. It is important to respect these rules whatever the circumstances. The auditors have frequently complained of non-observance of these rules.

### *Which rules apply?*

There are a number of instructions you should read. Those which follow are the basic texts to have at hand.

- UN Financial rules 110.18 and 110.19 (which concern circumstances in which bids or proposals must be called for) ST/A/327.
- UNHCR/IOM/41/88-UNHCR/FOM/36/88, which reflects the decisions and recommendations made by the External Auditors on UNHCR's consultancy contracts.

*Essential points to remember*

The following are essential points.

- Outside expertise should only be sought if the need cannot be met internally.
- If the contract involves an amount of US\$ 20,000 or more, there should be competitive bidding.
- If the amount involved is above US\$ 70,000, the approval of the Committee on Contracts at Headquarters is required.
- The contract must not exceed six months.
- All consultancies related to TSS areas of specialization must be arranged in consultation with TSS, as well as the definition of the precise terms of reference.

*What is the procedure?*

There are a number of stages to observe:

- Stage 1** Once the need for a technical consultant has been identified, submit your request (through the Regional Bureau) to the Head of TSS. Remember to include a short description of the project for which the consultant is needed, the proposed terms of reference, estimated schedule and related costs. If you already have suitable candidates, attach their C.V.s.
- Stage 2** Your request and proposed terms of reference are reviewed by TSS, in consultation with the Regional Bureau.
- Stage 3** TSS selects the most suitable candidate for the consultancy, co-ordinating this choice with the Regional Bureau.
- Stage 4** TSS and the Regional Bureau agree upon the appropriate source of financing for the consultancy budget. This may be the assistance project for which the consultancy has been requested. Alternatively, it may be an annual programme or trust fund designed to finance short-term consultancies.

The next stage of the procedure varies according to whether the contract concerns an individual consultant, or an Agency.

- Stage 5a** In the case of an *individual consultant*, TSS requests Personnel Service (CDRS) to establish the consultancy contract and make the necessary arrangements.

- Stage 5b** In the case of an *agency*, TSS or the Regional Bureau makes arrangements for the contract after approval by Supplies and Food Aid Service. In this case, the contract is in the form of a sub-agreement with the Agency.

**Evaluation**

Evaluation represents an important task. Be sure that you answer the following questions:

- were the contract objectives met?
- were the deadlines met?
- what was the quality of the work produced?
- were there any other aspects which it is important to bear in mind for future reference?

The answers to these questions are vital to help select consultants for future tasks, and ensure the quality of their work.

**TSS and procurement**

The procurement of supplies and food aid is the responsibility of SFAS at Headquarters. This task implies a whole set of specific procedures which are not covered in this module.

Procurement needs may arise in one of many sectors, as we shall soon see in the examples given below. This is where technical support has an important role to play. In particular, it can help ensure:

- adequate technical specifications
- cost-effectiveness
- applicability to a local context

**Examples of procurement in the field**

What follows are random examples of needs you might face, and the technical support you should seek.

- *A new or improved water system is required:* contact the Water Development Officer, who will advise you on the type of pump, related tools, and equipment best suited to your local situation.
- *You are responsible for a medical programme:* consult the Public Health Officer on health kits, medical equipment, drugs or vaccines to be procured.
- *Housing has to be provided in a rural settlement:* the Physical Planner can recommend appropriate low-cost staff or refugee housing (including a prototype emergency staff shelter designed by TSS).

- *You are faced with an emergency situation:* the Emergency Unit can advise you on the food or non-food items you need to stock or plan for.
- *The nutritional content of the food basket being distributed is inadequate:* the Nutritionist can help you identify how to correct it, which ration-level is needed and commodity composition.

All these examples demonstrate the role of technical support in the procurement (local or international) of essential items.

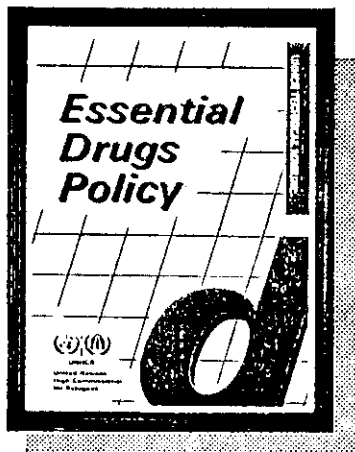
### Committee on Contracts

At Headquarters level, TSS is a member of the UNHCR Committee on Contracts and gives recommendations on the procurement of specific items related to its areas of technical competence, in liaison with SFAS and the Regional Bureaux. As we have already mentioned, there is a set of rules and procedures which govern the UNHCR Committee on Contracts. These are contained in IOM/85/89, which makes useful reading.

### Reference materials available to you

These reference materials can be a useful source of information to you. A list of what's available (or under development) is given in Annex 5. Contact TSS if you need further details or a copy of what appears on the list. You will note that there are several different categories of reference materials. Those likely to be of most interest to you are as follows.

### Technical manuals



Technical manuals provide you with essential information you may need. Their object is not to make you an expert in the various sectors they cover, but to increase your awareness of important technical aspects of assistance.

There are also a number of manuals produced jointly by UNHCR and other organizations. These mainly concern health and nutrition. They are also mentioned on the list.

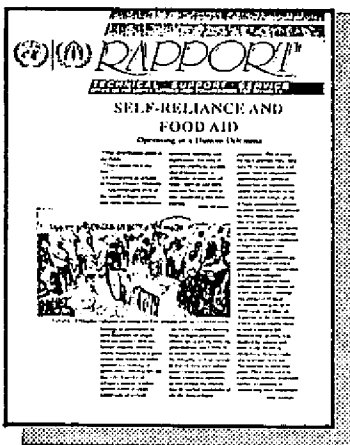
### *Technical reference materials*

Some mention has already been made of technical reference materials in Chapter 2. They include:

- UNHCR handbook for emergencies
- Emergency preparedness profiles
- Guide to in-kind contributions in refugee emergencies

A bibliography listing reference materials on technical support is found as Annex 6.

### *Rapport*



This quarterly newsletter provides information of a technical nature written for a wide audience. The subjects covered include anything from sanitation and emergency shelter to needs assessment and refugee participation. Make sure you get your copy.

### *Country briefing kits*

These will help fill in your knowledge of a given country to which you have been assigned. They contain information of a general nature, as well as useful details of local living conditions. Consult the Training Service or the Regional Bureaux if you want to know more.

## Training activities you should know about

Training events of concern to you include:

### ***Emergency management training***

Emergency management training has been described in Chapter 2.

### ***Specialized workshops***

Specialized workshops are available on a Country or Regional Basis. These may cover subjects such as income-generation, nutrition, community-based rehabilitation, education or social services. If you see a need for a training course in a technical area, your Field Training Co-ordinator should get in touch with TSS and Training Service.

### ***Other events***

One-time training workshops on specific topics—such as refugee children, disabled refugees, nutrition in times of disaster. The purpose of these events is to formulate technical guidelines of use to field offices.

## Review



1. *The functions of the Technical Support Service fall into two broad categories. What are they?*

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2. *Which of the following activities or services are within the terms of reference of Training Support Service?*

- programme management
- specifications for emergency water pumps
- emergency preparedness
- programme policy formulation
- setting nutrition guidelines
- specifications for site drainage
- training in emergency management
- resource assessment
- programme financial controls

3. *TSS can offer expertise in 5 main areas. What are they?*

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4. *You are considering engaging a consultant to provide expertise which is not available internally. Competitive bidding is required if the cost will be more than \_\_\_\_\_*

- US\$ 10,000
- US\$ 20,000
- US\$ 30,000

5. You must obtain the approval of the Committee on Contracts if the amount exceeds US\$ \_\_\_\_\_.  
(fill in the blank)

\_\_\_\_\_

6. What is the maximum duration of the consultancy contract?

- \_\_\_\_\_ 6 months
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9 months
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12 months

7. What is the importance of the role of TSS in the procurement of supplies?

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**Group Exercise**

An assessment of a refugee emergency engages virtually all of the sectors requiring technical assistance. Working in small groups, identify each of the areas that require assessment, list at least three types of data that you need to collect in that area, and identify possible sources of expertise to plan an appropriate response to each of those areas.



## Answer Key



1. *The functions of the Technical Support Service fall into two broad categories. What are they?*

TSS has *operational* and *resource* functions.

2. *Which of the following activities or services are within the terms of reference of Training Support Service?*

- programme management
- specifications for emergency water pumps
- emergency preparedness
- programme policy formulation
- setting nutrition guidelines
- specifications for site drainage
- training in emergency management
- resource assessment
- programme financial controls

3. *TSS can offer expertise in 5 main areas. What are they?*

1. emergency preparedness and response
2. education and vocational training
3. social and economic development
4. health and nutrition
5. engineering

4. *You are considering engaging a consultant to provide expertise which is not available internally. Competitive bidding is required if the cost will be more than \_\_\_\_\_*

- US\$ 10,000
- US\$ 20,000
- US\$ 30,000

5. You must obtain the approval of the Committee on Contracts if the amount exceeds US\$ \_\_\_\_\_. US\$ 70,000  
(fill in the blank)

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 6 months  
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- adequate technical specifications
- cost-effectiveness
- applicability to the local context