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**MSF-CIS (Célula Inter-Secções), Mozambique:
A Data Collecting System
Focused on Food Security and Population Movements**

Tine Dusauchoit¹

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MSF-CIS (Célula Inter-Secções), Mozambique: A Data Collecting System Focused on Food Security and Population Movements

1. Introduction

During the 1991-1992 rain season, Southern Africa experienced a widespread drought judged to be the most severe of the previous 50 years and possibly of this century. In Mozambique, the drought overlaid and exacerbated the existing chronic emergency situation caused by the ongoing civil war between the Government (FRELIMO) and RENAMO. The war which had begun shortly after independence in 1975 resulted in massive population displacements both internally and as refugees into neighbouring countries, the destruction of economic, administrative and social welfare infrastructure (bridges, factories, health facilities and schools), attacks on overland transport forcing the use of escorted convoys or air transport between FRELIMO-controlled areas and disrupting normal trading activity¹. The Emergency Appeal launched by the Government of Mozambique in Paris in May 1992 set the number of people in need of relief food at 3.1 million of which 1.8 million were judged to be 'war affected' and 1.3 million 'drought affected'. The total population of the country at the time was estimated at 16.2 million, of which 1.5 million were refugees in neighbouring countries.

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is an international Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) that gives assistance to populations in emergency situations (man-made or other disasters). Its activities are mainly in the field of health and health related issues (nutrition, sanitation). MSF has been present in Mozambique since 1985. In April 1992, when the CIS project was initiated, five national MSF sections were present and had activities in 7 out of the 10 provinces. These were: MSF-Belgium, working in areas of Tete and Inhambane province; MSF-France, working in areas of Zambezia, Manica, and Sofala

¹ For a comprehensive account of the conflict, its impact on the population and the use of famine and food as tools of war, see Africa Watch (1992).

provinces; MSF-Holland working in areas of Niassa and Nampula provinces; and MSF-Spain and MSF-Switzerland, both active in Maputo province. These programmes had invariably started as emergency interventions and evolved into programmes which may be described as "longer term programmes in an unstable context". Emergency preparedness activities were considered an important part of these programmes.

Since 1984, when the FRELIMO Government allowed the first international NGO to begin working in the country, the number of international NGOs working in Mozambique grew rapidly, a process encouraged by bilateral donors channelling an increasing proportion of their assistance through NGOs. In early 1992, over 100 NGOs were present in the country, operating a wide variety of programmes both in terms of activities and approaches. However, communication between NGOs was limited. Although there was some cooperation at the provincial level, this was virtually non-existent at the national level. Even amongst the various sections of MSF, formal cooperation was limited.

In October 1992, soon after many of the drought response activities began implementation, a General Peace Agreement was signed in Rome between FRELIMO and RENAMO. This brought about a profound change in the country and the context in which NGOs operated. Large scale population movements began principally from urban and peri-urban areas to rural areas and subsequently of refugees returning to the country. There was then a substantial improvement in logistics and communications, and it became soon possible for NGOs to extend their operations into areas which had either been RENAMO-controlled or highly insecure.

2. Rationale for the Project

By early April 1992, it became clear that the effects of the drought would be severe and that agencies involved in the provision of relief and rehabilitation assistance would have to step up their activities. In the case of MSF, several

option for responding to the drought were available, such as expanding supplementary and therapeutic feeding activities, and initiating or expanding water and sanitation programmes, i.e. the type of activities in which MSF has particular experience.

When the five sections of MSF first met to discuss the impact and implications of the drought, it became clear that although there was broad agreement on the seriousness of the problem at an aggregate level, the information available on the situation at the district level was subjective and sporadic. Furthermore, there was a general consensus between the MSF sections that, because of limitations on the financial, material and human resources available, it would be necessary to target those districts and populations most in need of assistance. To do so would require an information system capable of providing operationally useful, up-to-date information from the districts.

Several information systems existed at that time and continue in operation in 1994. In terms of food security, the principal systems were:

- The Ministry of Health's 'Boletim de Nutrição' (Nutritional report) is produced on a quarterly basis and provides an overview of rates of growth faltering and low birth weight for all districts and integrates the results of nutritional surveys. The data set is very comprehensive, but as it has to be transmitted from the district level to the provincial level and then to the national level, the time lapse between the data being recorded and the distribution of the results is usually several months.
- The 'Sistema Nacional de Aviso Prévio para a Segurança Alimentar' (National Early Warning System for Food Security) is operated by the Ministry of Agriculture with support from the FAO and has several publications. The 'Boletim Trimestral' (Quarterly report) gives a national overview of agrometeorological data as well as of the status of the principal crops. Elapsed time between the

collection and dissemination of the analysed data is several months. The 'Relatório Mensal' is a monthly publication which describes the prevailing agrometeorological conditions and gives an overview of the agricultural season. During the rainy season, an additional decadal report is published as well ('Relatório Agromet decadal'), which highlights the agrometereological situation.

- The 'Boletim Mensal de Informação do Mercado' (Monthly report on market information) is a monthly publication of the Ministry of Agriculture/Michigan State University that collects price data of various products at different levels of the marketing system.
- The Food Security Department of the Ministry of Commerce publishes a quarterly 'Boletim Trimestral de Segurança Alimentar' (Quarterly report on food security) which gives, in addition to the national overview of agrometereological data and state of crops, an overview of the cereal balance for the current marketing year and of the import programme situation. There is also a monthly update which highlights the food balance for the market sector as well as the import situation.

Apart from these regular publications by government ministries and departments, information was available from other sources, such as reports by WFP, FAO and other UN agencies, assessment mission reports, visit reports, etc. Despite all these different sources, there was no regular and timely reporting system that gave an overview of the food security and nutritional situation at the district level. Information was scattered over several publications, was often not produced in a timely manner and was rarely disaggregated to the district level. In early 1992, the various sections of MSF had an operational presence in 45 out of the total of 127 districts in the country, though for reasons of inaccessibility and insecurity the use of chartered aircrafts limited this 'presence' in some districts to a few hours each month. Within MSF there was therefore the potential for an information system to achieve coverage of a substantial part

of the country. MSF therefore decided to establish a new information system, the initial objectives of which were, according to the original proposal:

- to enable MSF teams in the field to appreciate the severity of the nutritional situation and food availability;
- to establish priorities for MSF sections and other agencies in terms of the geographical areas and types of intervention;
- to transmit the information, suitably analysed and synthesised, to other institutions and organisations involved in the response (Government agencies, UN agencies, the European Community, other NGOs, donors, etc.);
- to integrate the information into the decision-making process for resource allocations, eg. food distribution plan at district level;
- to represent MSF sections in matters related to the drought and food security;

The project began formally in May 1992 with funding initially being provided from within MSF. The questionnaire for the collection of monthly information was developed during May-June and was sent out to the teams in the field in July. The first of the series of monthly bulletins was published in August 1992 covering the month of July. From the start, CIS actively sought the participation of other NGOs and other agencies in establishing the system.

A funding proposal was prepared and submitted to both UNICEF (in Maputo) and the European Community (in Brussels) in July 1992. UNICEF granted funding immediately, covering a 9 month period (till March 1993). At present, the project is funded by the EC (December 1992 - June 1994).

3. Operational Aspects

MSF had previous experience in establishing information systems, particularly early warning and health/nutritional status systems. In close collaboration with the Association Européenne pour le Développement et la Santé (AEDES), MSF had initiated early warning systems in Chad and Mali. Technical assistance was therefore sought from AEDES in developing the questionnaires and the methods for gathering basic information such as population data, the accessibility of populations and coping strategies. AEDES has continued to provide technical assistance to the project. The system devised used NGOs operating in different districts to collect and transmit information on a monthly basis, with CIS specifying the information to be collected (in the form of a questionnaire developed by CIS) and providing support to the NGOs (in the form of limited funding for the NGOs to employ or cover the cost of local 'informants' and training provided by CIS to the local 'informants' and some of the NGOs personnel).

For each district covered by CIS, a nominated NGO takes responsibility for checking and completing the data, as well as for sending the completed questionnaires to Maputo in time for the data to be incorporated into the monthly bulletin. In some districts, more than one NGO may be involved in data collection but it is the nominated NGO which takes responsibility for collating and transmitting the data. The questionnaires are filled out each month by 'local informants'. These are Mozambicans living in the districts who are identified by the NGO responsible for data collection in that district. They receive training in how to fill out the questionnaire either directly from CIS or the NGO concerned, the team members of the NGO having been previously trained by CIS either in Maputo or in the field.

Local informants are contracted by the NGO operating in the district. Sometimes their only task is that of data collection for CIS, though many are involved in other activities as well. In Gaza province, the NGO which had originally contracted the local informants stopped working in the province at the end of the drought and CIS, wishing to continue receiving information from that

area, took over responsibility for employing them. As Gaza province is close to Maputo, it is possible to maintain regular contact with these particular local informants. All local informants receive some remuneration for their work, either in the form of a monthly salary or in the form of incentives, with CIS providing the NGOs with the necessary funding. As different NGOs have different salary rates, the amount to be paid is agreed between CIS and individual NGOs. All payments are in the local currency Meticaís. Generally speaking, the informants receive the equivalent of US\$5 - 10 per month. The directly employed informants in Gaza collect information in more localities and so receive a higher salary, equivalent to US\$80 per month, as well as remuneration for transport costs which amount to another US\$50 per month.

Informants collect information either through their own observation and inquiries or by obtaining information from other agencies working in the district. For instance, information on the availability and price of basic food commodities on the local market is collected directly by the informants, whilst data on growth faltering is obtained from the local district health director and data on free food distributions by other agencies is obtained from the respective agencies.

For the first few months of the CIS's operation, most NGOs sent the questionnaires by mail and by trusted carriers. In several cases, information had to be transmitted by short wave radio. During 1993, the situation improved considerably following the Peace Agreement. In particular, overland travel between the districts and provincial capitals became much easier with the re-establishment of regular traffic movements and improved telecommunication links - presently virtually all NGOs offices in the provincial capitals possess fax machines. Though mail still accounts for the majority of questionnaires sent to CIS, fax transmissions are the second most favoured means of communication.

In terms of staffing in Maputo, the CIS team grew from two members at the start of the programme to five members as of February 1994 (4 expatriates and 1 Mozambican). With the growth of the team, there was an important increase in technical skills available. The team has maintained a high level of enthusiasm which is vital if the tight production deadlines required by the

monthly bulletin are to be met. This blend of complementary technical skills and enthusiasm has been important to the successful operation of the CIS. The production of the monthly bulletin takes up about a third of the time of the team and remains the most important activity. Much of the rest of the time is spent on field visits, the purpose of which may be to improve coverage of the system, maintain contact with participating NGOs, train local informants, and generally keep in touch with the constantly changing situation in different areas of the country. In addition, nutritional surveys are undertaken in conjunction with NGOs in particular districts.

How much does the system cost to operate? An initial grant of US\$252,000 received from UNICEF was used for the initial phase of the project, ie. July 1992 to March 1993. Since then, project costs are covered using funds provided by the European Community. From April 1993 to December 1993, a total of 181,000 ECU (equivalent to US\$203,000) was extended. As the expenditures were more or less constant throughout this period, monthly costs averaged around US\$23,000. To set these sums within the context of the overall costs of the emergency programme, the May 1992 Appeal requested a total of US\$457 million of which US\$250 million was pledged by donor organisations by mid-November the same year.

4. Method of Data Analysis

From the outset, the CIS has attempted to grade districts according to the four categories 'apparently good' (*aparentemente boa*), 'to be watched' (*a vigiar*), 'worrisome' (*preocupante*) and 'serious' (*grave*). Though such gradings have formed an important component of the monthly bulletin, it should be said that they have always been complemented by written accounts of the situation in each district. A difficulty confronting the CIS from the outset was determining 'normal' behaviour so as to provide a baseline against which certain indicators may be compared. The result of 16 years of civil war is that coping strategies developed in the context of the war have become incorporated into the 'normal' livelihood strategies of the population.

When CIS began operating, the basis for determining the grading accorded to each district was a scoring system, based entirely on quantitative indicators. Examples of the quantitative indicators employed were: the numbers of new arrivals; the percentage increase in children admitted for malnutrition; the percentage increase in food prices at the local markets. Such a reliance on quantitative indicators was probably unavoidable during the initial phase of the project, before CIS staff had acquired a more detailed knowledge of the situation at the district level.

This scoring system was later discarded for several reasons. The data was increasingly recognised to be of very variable quality. It was often difficult to use the data in comparing the situation between districts and neither was it always of use in defining the 'baseline/normal' situation in particular districts. With the improved knowledge of the situation in different districts gained from field visits and contact with the teams, it became clear that other important factors had to be taken into consideration.

Although criteria exist which can be used in interpreting certain indicators, the 'rigidity' with which these criteria are applied has to take into consideration such factors as the form of the data (quantitative/qualitative), the quality of data, other relevant information, the accessibility of the population, and the degree to which the situation is chronic or transitory. For example, in determining the level of risk that returnees represent, not only are their numbers important, but it is equally important to know if relief agencies are present to provide services. To determine the nutritional status, growth faltering data and rates of low birth weight are useful and have clearly defined cut-off points as used by the Ministry of Health, but if a nutritional survey has recently been undertaken and indicates a different situation this will also need to be taken into consideration.

Since the rigid scoring system was discarded, the grading process has utilised an analytical framework within which greater use has been made of qualitative indicators and the judgement of the CIS team on the basis of all the available quantitative and qualitative information. First of all, the grades 'apparently good', 'to be watched', 'worrisome' and 'serious' are accorded to six 'topics'

for each district for which data has been received, namely population movement, market situation, food stocks, nutritional situation, food aid and health situation.

Population movement (*movimento de população*) is assessed on the basis of the number of people arriving, their general health status and the capacity of the local infrastructure to accommodate them.

Market situation (*situação nos mercados*) is based on market availability and the prices of basic commodities assessed in the context of the needs of the population (ie. local harvest and access to other markets).

Food stocks (*reserva alimentar*) is an estimation of locally produced food stocks based on harvest reports and small surveys of household stocks undertaken by the local informants.

Nutritional situation (*situação nutricional*) is based on any available data from general health structures, feeding centres and nutritional surveys.

Food aid (*ajuda alimentar*) is assessed on the basis of ration size, the percentage of the population receiving rations and the regularity of distribution.

Health situation (*situação sanitaria*) is based on information on morbidity rates and the presence of measles and diarrhoeal diseases (including cholera) that have a major impact on mortality and the nutritional status of the population.

On the basis of the gradings accorded to the six 'topics', a 'global' grade is agreed on for each district. The process is not merely one of addition as the team attaches different, though approximate, weightings to the different topics.

The process by which the questionnaire information is actually handled and the bulletins compiled is as follows. On arrival at the CIS office, the questionnaire data is processed by the team. Each team member analyses the data from 2 or 3 provinces, with the responsibility for the write-up for the different provinces being rotated regularly amongst the team members, thereby enabling each members to become familiar with the situation in all parts of the country. Initially, the data from the questionnaires are put onto a LOTUS spreadsheet, each locality having its own file. No statistical analysis is performed on the data, the spreadsheet serving mainly as a visual aid for viewing trends in the situation in that particular district. Once the spreadsheets are completed, a written description of the current situation is prepared for each district for which data has been received according to a standardised format. Whenever feasible (i.e. where telephone, fax or radio communications are available) the field teams responsible for preparing the questionnaires are contacted to clarify particular points or obtain supplementary information as well as to discuss and provide feedback on the overall interpretation of the data made by CIS. The role of fax communications is particularly valuable in this process.

Other kinds of information are also collected and used by CIS. Reports prepared by Government agencies, UN agencies and NGOs in a variety of form (bulletins, newsletters, visit reports, activity reports, etc.) are obtained (*See table 1 for overview of the process of data collection*) and taken into consideration when writing the descriptions of the situation in the district. Because these other sources of information are very varied in their level of analysis, disciplinary perspective and approach, they are often highly complementary to the information derived from the questionnaires.

The whole process of analysis takes place over two days, during which time the data are compared both longitudinally and cross-sectionally. During the discussions, information from other sources (mentioned above) as well as the teams contextual knowledge is added.

5. Functioning and Role of CIS in the Context of the Drought

CIS was designed to function as a monitoring system in the context of the drought: the name initially stood for "Cellule Inter-MSF Sécheresse" ("Inter-MSF Drought Unit"). During the initial months, information was obtained exclusively through the different MSF sections. However, other NGOs and agencies soon began to participate in the system as well. As of early 1994, approximately 60% of the information contained in the bulletins is provided by MSF sections, the remainder coming from other sources (*see Map for the nominated NGOs responsible for each district as at the end of 1993*). Initially, the agencies participating with CIS had programmes mainly in the field of health and nutrition, whereas the NGOs now involved represent a wide range of activities (eg. health, agriculture, food distribution). Amongst the 'regular' contributors, other than MSF, are ActionAid, Agence Internationale contre la Faim (AICF), Food for the Hungry International (FHI), Finnish Volunteer Service (FVS), International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), International Federation of the Red Cross/ Mozambican Red Cross (IFRC/MRC), Mozambican Health Committee (MHC), OXFAM-UK, Save the Children Fund (SCF-UK), Save the Children Federation (SCF-US), Terre des Hommes (TdH), World Relief and World Vision. Other NGOs have been approached to contribute as well. There are also substantial contributions from the government (Ministry of Health, Ministry of Agriculture) as well as from UN agencies, such as World Food Programme (WFP) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and especially United Nations Office for Humanitarian Assistance Coordination (UNOHAC).

The factors influencing the decision by individual NGOs to contribute to the CIS vary but appear to include the objectives of the agency, the staff-time they feel able to devote to CIS, their opinion on the use and usefulness of the system. Staff time is an important consideration for many agencies as the data collection for CIS is additional to the normal workload of the participating agencies and for many agencies the period following the October Peace Agreement involved a substantial increase in their workload. In return though, CIS offers technical assistance to the participating agencies such as helping in the design and

implementation of nutritional and socio-economic surveys, analysis of the results and drawing up the recommendations. The provision of technical assistance to participating agencies has become an important aspect of CIS's work.

Dissemination of information through the monthly bulletin has been a cornerstone of CIS's activities. The number of copies produced each month was initially 60 but this rapidly increased to several hundred. The bulletin is distributed widely at central, provincial and district levels - the latter in order to provide feedback to those involved in collecting the data. The organisations receiving the bulletin include:

- **Government agencies:** at the national level, the Ministries of Health, Agriculture, Commerce and Cooperation, the National Emergency Commission; at the provincial and district level, the directorates of Health, the Emergency Commissions, the Governors and District Administrators.
- **UN agencies:** at the national level, UNICEF, UNOHAC, UNHCR, FAO, WFP, UNDP, WHO, ...; at the provincial level, UNOHAC representatives, WFP food monitoring officers, UNHCR field officers.
- **NGOs:** all major international and national NGOs at Maputo level, representatives at the district level receive the bulletin if they contribute to the system or if they request it.
- **Donor community:** the European Community, USAID, other bilateral donors, ambassadors, etc.
- **Other recipients:** RENAMO representatives at the national and provincial level, church representatives, press agencies, etc.

Setting up the distribution system to ensure that the bulletins reached recipients at the provincial and district level in a timely manner involved transmission arrangements that were often complicated. Continued efforts have to be made to ensure that these arrangements are sustained.

Considerable efforts were made to present the data in as clear a manner as possible and the bulletin therefore makes extensive use of maps and tables. During the first phase of the programme, there were constant changes in order to increase the coverage, improve the questionnaire, and improve the presentation of the data.

A user's survey was carried out mid-1993, to try and determine what use was made of the information in the bulletin by the different recipients. Unfortunately, the response rate was low with only 40 responses, principally NGOs and members of the donor community, to the 229 questionnaires sent out. As might be expected, NGO respondents were particularly interested in information relating to the districts where they had programmes and the potential for responding to the changing priorities at that level. Donor respondents were more interested in the provincial and national-level picture, monitoring the changing situation and the identification of unmet needs. For most of the respondents of the survey, the principal use of the bulletin was to compare the level of needs across the country and to assist in the coordination of NGO activities.

Recommendations produced by CIS, for instance on priority needs in particular areas, do not feed directly into any particular response mechanism, so it cannot be guaranteed that all the recommendations will be acted upon. Nevertheless, the bulletin is received by a wide range of actors involved in relief activities and is used in their various decision-making process - though it is usually impossible to measure the extent to which the information influences their decisions. However, there have been several instances where CIS information has resulted in specific actions:

- The lack of food distributions over a long period in Morrumbala District in Zambezia province and its consequences for the nutritional status of the population was highlighted in the bulletin of September 1992. Together with lobbying by MSF-F (the NGO collecting data in that district) both at the provincial and central level, this led to road repairs which made the renewal of food distributions possible.
- The data collected by CIS, together with a nutritional survey carried out in collaboration with CIS in Mandimba District in Niassa province, highlighted a precarious nutritional situation in January 1993 and WFP and DPCCN responded rapidly with food deliveries to the district.
- In February 1993, WFP planned to reduce the quantities of maize to be distributed from 15 kg/person/month to 10.5 kg/person/month in Gaza, Inhambane, Sofala, Manica and Tete provinces, because it was thought that there was too much maize on local markets. During the meeting to discuss this proposal, the CIS was able to demonstrate that, whilst WFPs case was strong in relation to the markets in and around Maputo it was not valid for rural markets in these particular provinces and recommended that the changes proposed by WFP be postponed until the first assessments became available for the next harvest. Several other agencies employed the same arguments, in several cases referring to the CIS information. The rations were only reduced following the harvest.

CIS has also played a role in improving communication and cooperation between NGOs, including between the different sections of MSF. This occurred in various ways:

- CIS developed an information and documentation centre, with a wide range of books and articles covering such diverse topics as nutritional assessment, nutrition related interventions, emergency preparedness, etc.. This library has been extensively consulted by NGOs and other agencies especially during the drought period when a number of new NGOs established programmes in the country. This has helped to reduce the incidence of agencies 'reinventing the wheel' through the sharing of knowledge and expertise.
- CIS has developed a database, which can be freely consulted, containing information from successive questionnaires, agency reports, etc. for each district. Many organisations make use of this information.
- CIS was actively involved in training activities, such as increasing knowledge on nutritional survey techniques, including training in the use of the EPI-INFO and EPI-NUT software. In June 1993, CIS organised a seminar on nutritional surveillance, in which various NGOs, the Ministry of Health and UNICEF participated. An important aspect of this seminar was the exchange of experience on how certain nutrition-related interventions, for instance therapeutic and supplementary feeding programmes, were organised by different NGOs.
- For its own needs, CIS had to collect a wide range of maps as well as develop its own set of maps using LOTUS and Harvard Graphics software. All these have been shared with other NGOs and agencies.
- CIS has convened several meetings to discuss problems occurring in Gaza province with NGOs and other agencies. CIS had identified problems in the province and when it was felt that the response was inadequate, in part because of a limited NGO

presence in the province, the meetings were convened. Meetings of this kind have now largely been taken over by LINK, the NGO coordination unit which was not operating at the start of the CIS project ².

6. The Post-Drought and Post-War Context

The rains of 1992-93 were normal and brought the drought to an end. More importantly the Peace Agreement was signed on October 4th 1992. This brought about important population movements both of the internally displaced and of refugees. As was the case during the drought, no system was in place to monitor these movements or their impact at the district level. Had it not been for the need to monitor this situation, it is likely that CIS would have ceased operations after the drought, but it was decided to adapt the project so that it could be of use in this new context. The questionnaire was modified and new topics added. The monthly bulletin continues to focus on food security and the nutritional health situation at the district level, but priority is now given to the monitoring of population movements and their impact.

To monitor the population movements, the CIS system now collects information on the numbers of registered returnees/new arrivals; estimates of non-registered returnees/new arrivals; their general and nutritional status; where they are staying (transit camps, accommodation centres, etc); and who is providing

² LINK is an independent NGO coordination unit with a membership open to all (national and international) NGOs working in Mozambique. Its objectives are to stimulate increased cooperation and coordination between international and Mozambican NGOs and the UN, the Government, donors and others involved in the provision of humanitarian assistance and development programmes in the country; to strengthen Mozambican NGOs; to provide a common forum for raising professional and practical issues of concern to NGOs; to present and advocate NGO views to decision making and policy formulating bodies; to support the General Peace Agreement and to secure NGO participation in its implementation and to promote regional cooperation in the repatriation of refugees and the reintegration of refugees and internal displaced persons.

services for them. The other new topics that have been included in the CIS system are harvest information (forecasts and outcomes), agricultural recovery programmes (seed and tool distributions) and food reserves. Links have also been established with NGOs in neighbouring countries which contained Mozambican refugees who are now in the process of repatriation. The NGOs involved include the American Refugee Committee (ARC) and the International Rescue Committee (IRC), as well as MSF sections. Information about the situation in Mozambique is of great value to such agencies in the planning of their programmes. Although the bulletin is still written in Portuguese, the sections describing the general situation at national and provincial level as well as other relevant information are presented both in English and in Portuguese.

With the end of the drought and the change in CIS's focus, a modification was needed to its title. As the acronym 'CIS' had become well-known the letters were kept, though it now stands for "Célula Inter-Secções" (Inter-Section Unit).

As a result of the increased number of recipients, the bulletin currently has a circulation of around 600 copies.

Because of its wide distribution, each issue of the bulletin now includes one or more specific topics that are judged useful in the post-war context. CIS staff have contributed their own analyses of population movements, food distribution issues and the situation of refugees in neighbouring countries. Articles written by experts in a particular field on subjects such as landmine casualties, land tenure issues and mine awareness programmes have also been included.

7. Weaknesses and Strengths of the CIS-System

It should be clear from the above that CIS is neither an early warning system nor an epidemiological health monitoring system. Instead, it should be seen as a system for collecting a broad range of information on a regular basis to form a generalised picture of the situation which can then be used to catalyze

appropriate action³.

The system has a number of inherent weaknesses, due largely to the fact that it is an opportunistic system reliant upon the participation of different NGOs. The principal weaknesses are:

- It does not cover all districts. On average, reports are received for only 40 to 50% of the total number of districts.
- The quality of data is very variable and this was especially true during the first phase. Increased field visits and training of local informants has resulted in an overall improvement in data quality. Nevertheless, the high turnover of expatriates in some NGOs makes it difficult to maintain a consistency in data quality.
- as the data collecting is done on top of normal work, it is not always possible for participating NGOs to guarantee a follow-up in cases where districts have been described as being at risk.

Another problem concerns the degree to which data collected in the locality where a participating NGO is working can be taken as being representative of the situation in the whole district. During the drought, it was probably safer to make generalisations about the situation in a district on the basis of information from particular localities than is the case now where the factors influencing conditions such as population movements are likely to be highly localised.

That the CIS is not directly linked to any one organisation that is mandated to act upon CIS recommendations must be seen as an important weakness. CIS is only one source of information in a complex process of decision making at

³ For a very interesting overview and discussion on the role of nutritional surveillance in a context of famine see Helen Young and Susanne Jaspars, May 1992.

different levels - a process which is often lacking in transparency. Consequently, it is not possible to measure its actual impact on decision making.

On the other hand, the CIS has played an important role in stimulating NGO collaboration, particularly between those personally involved in the data collection. Because it quite rapidly achieved a certain credibility through the regularity of the bulletin and the wide range of data covered, CIS has undoubtedly played a major advocacy role. There are several examples where it has contributed to specific actions being undertaken. Furthermore, it has also indicated priorities for further investigation. This is also true at the local level. In certain cases, CIS has helped teams to better appreciate the food security and nutritional health situation. Some NGOs now look at nutritional health in the broader context of food security as a result of CIS's activities.

The bulletin is widely read and used by different agencies in Mozambique and the indications are that it is appreciated. Feedback received from organisations in neighbouring countries also indicates that it is valued by those agencies working with Mozambican refugees.

Ultimately, the fact that there is still no other comparable information system available demonstrates CIS' value.

8. What Future (if any) for CIS?

The time of writing (February 1994) is an appropriate moment to reflect upon the future of the project. The overall situation in the country has considerably improved, the first predictions about this year's main harvest will soon be made and the funding period is nearing its end. Is there a need to continue with this kind of monitoring system with wide coverage producing monthly bulletins?

Mozambique is in a transition phase, the context is no longer one of emergency as it was when this project was born. Some of the elements that characterize the actual situation are:

- A considerable improvement of the security situation
- A very much improved food security situation, because of factors such as the above-average harvest in 1993, improvement in the deliveries of relief food as a result of improved road access, and a certain revival of rural markets.
- Problems are increasingly encountered at a level lower than the district level by particular groups within the population, such as recent returnees, people living in former RENAMO areas, people living in areas where landmines make access particularly difficult. Monitoring at this level is more difficult.
- There is a greater capacity in the country for responding to problems, including emergencies. Improved accessibility has resulted in improved efficiency and a capacity at the provincial and district levels. There is a larger UN presence at the field level, particularly in the case of UNHCR and UNOHAC. There is also a growing tendency for decision-making to be decentralised from Maputo to the provincial level. Consequently, it is increasingly in the provincial capitals that there is a need for operationally useful monitoring information which can provide alerts and help determine priorities.

The CIS is an opportunistic system, making use of the presence of NGOs in the field, therefore the whole system heavily depends on the presence of these NGOs. In this changing context, it is already clear that there is a corresponding change in the presence of NGOs. The more 'emergency-oriented' NGOs (or personnel within those NGOs) are gradually being replaced by those that are more oriented to 'development' and longer term considerations. Therefore, the whole network that CIS has built up is likely to undergo major changes over the next year or so.

The options for the future of the CIS appear to be to terminate it at the end of the present funding period (i.e. the end of June 1994) or to continue it but in a much modified form, almost as a 'new' project.

The first could be justified in terms of a reduced requirement for this kind of information system. Furthermore, it might not be feasible to 'transform' an emergency project such as CIS, functioning with 'tools' that might only have been appropriate in an emergency context, into a longer term monitoring system. By the end of June 1994, the project will have been operational for two years and overall will have achieved its objectives.

The second choice could be justified in terms of the using the experience, expertise and the network of communication and relations that CIS has gradually built up for the benefit of a longer term project more tailored to the new context. If a 'new' project were agreed which employed different data collection methods, focused its attention at a different level of analysis, and produced a bulletin less frequently, such assets could be of considerable value. For instance, sentinel sites could be selected amongst those districts that will continue to receive a major influx of returnees and in those districts that are known to be chronically food-insecure. A publication produced every two months could be more appropriate and would also leave the team with more time and energy to concentrate on the provision of technical assistance to NGOs in the field and on in-depth analysis. A major challenge for such a theoretical new project would be to retain its independence and organisational neutrality, whilst at the same time networking with other agencies and organisations involved in relief activities and/or information systems. These issues are under consideration at the time of writing.

9. Can Similar Initiatives Take off Elsewhere?

CIS started in an emergency context as a local initiative of MSF, an 'emergency-oriented' NGO. From the start, its objectives have been defined in terms of 'actions' and pragmatic aspects have consistently taken precedence over

academic rigor. If CIS has been a successful project so far, it is because it was born out of a strongly felt need amongst agencies responding to the situation. Given the time and energy which needs to be invested by agencies in setting up and maintaining such a system, it is crucial that the need for such a system is widely shared.

If this condition exists it would seem that similar initiatives can take off in other emergency situations if the following conditions are fulfilled:

- The presence of a sizeable number of NGOs that can implement relief activities at the field level and thereby have a good knowledge of the local situation and have close links with Government agencies at that level.
- The lack of existing alternative systems that could be adapted to respond to the need.
- The presence of a lead agency, i.e an agency that possesses a thorough knowledge of the local situation, a strong field presence and a sufficient 'mix' of enthusiasm and professionalism.
- The presence of readily available funds, to permit a rapid start.
- The existence of a good telecommunication network, especially in large countries. In smaller countries, regular transport facilities can make up for the absence of good telecommunication facilities.

As the example of CIS demonstrates, good communication between NGOs at the start is not essential. Nevertheless, it will be easier and quicker to set up such a system where NGOs are already familiar with each others programmes and where there is a climate of openness between NGOs.

The above requirements assume an emergency context. It would be interesting to know if similar initiatives have been developed in countries not experiencing an emergency but where there is a real need to share information on a regular basis. Examples might be where a large number of NGOs are involved in broadly similar programmes and activities, and countries in a transition phase from emergency to development, ...

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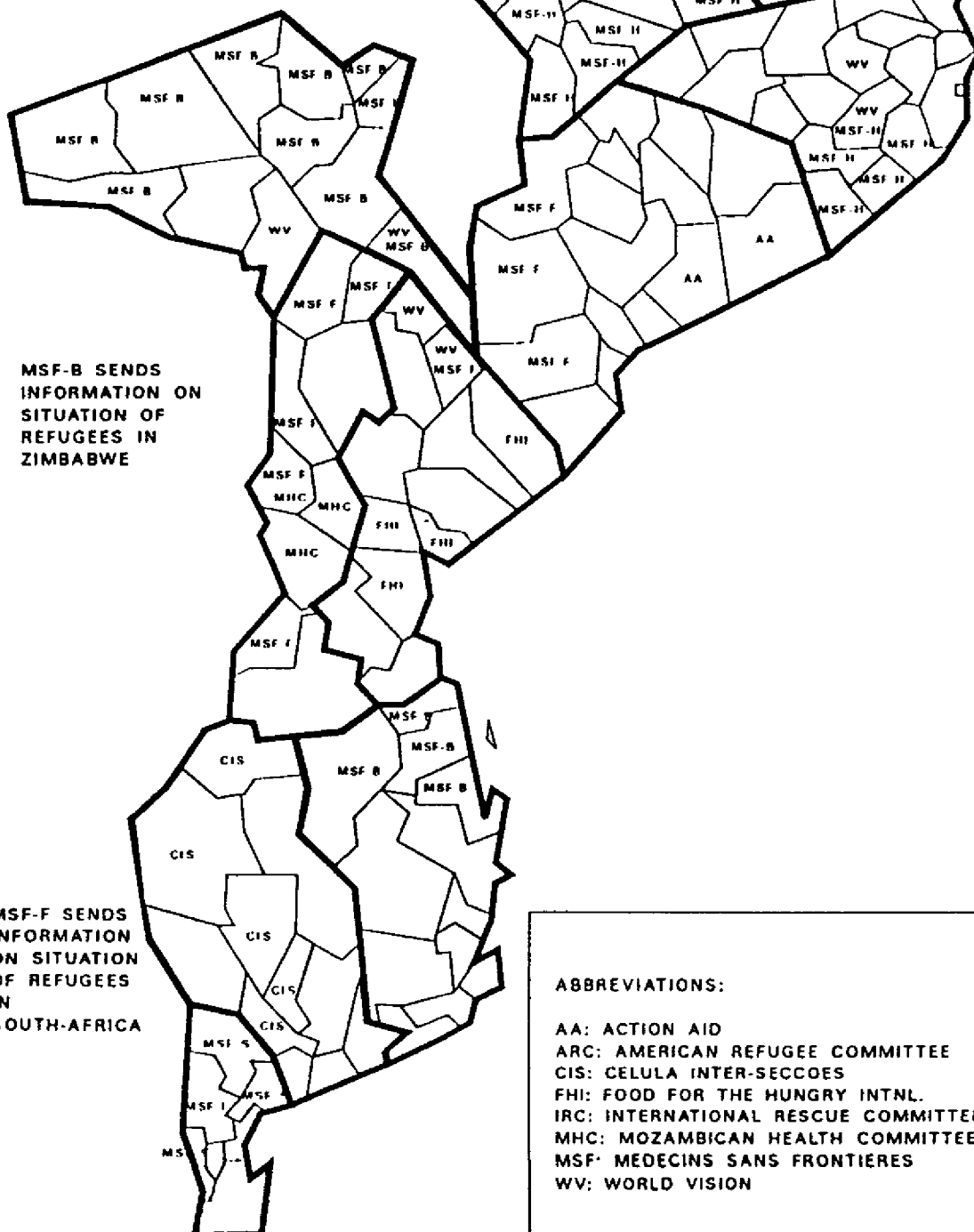
Acronyms

AEDES	Association Européenne pour le Développement et la Santé
ARC	American Refugee Committee
CIS	Célula Inter-Secções
DPCCN	National Directorate for Emergency Relief
EC	European Community
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
IRC	International Rescue Committee
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOHAC	United Nations Office for Humanitarian Assistance Coordination
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organisation

Appendices

**Nominated NGOs Responsible
for Data Collection in Specific
Districts,
Situation as at the end of 1993**

INFORMATION WITH
REGARDS TO REFUGEES IN
MALAWI PROVIDED BY
MSF-F, ARC AND IRC



ABBREVIATIONS:

AA: ACTION AID
ARC: AMERICAN REFUGEE COMMITTEE
CIS: CELULA INTER-SECCOES
FHI: FOOD FOR THE HUNGRY INTNL.
IRC: INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE
MHC: MOZAMBICAN HEALTH COMMITTEE
MSF: MEDECINS SANS FRONTIERES
WV: WORLD VISION

Relief and Rehabilitation Network

The objective of the Relief and Rehabilitation Network (RRN) is to facilitate the exchange of professional information and experience between the personnel of NGOs and other agencies involved in the provision of relief and rehabilitation assistance. Members of the Network are either nominated by their agency or may apply on an individual basis. Each year, RRN members receive four mailings in either English or French. A Newsletter and Network Papers are mailed to members every March and September and 'State of the Art' Reviews on topics in the relief and rehabilitation field every June and December. In addition, RRN members are able to obtain advice on technical and operational problems they are facing from the RRN staff in London. A modest charge is made for membership with rates varying in the case of agency-nominated members depending on the type of agency.

The RRN is operated by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) in conjunction with the European Association of Non-Governmental Organisations for Food Aid and Emergency Relief (EuronAid). ODI is an independent centre for development research and a forum for policy discussion on issues affecting economic relations between the North and South and social and economic policies within developing countries. EuronAid provides logistics and financing services to NGOs using EC food aid in their relief and development programmes. It has 25 member agencies and four with observer status. Its offices are located in the Hague.

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