

RESEARCH REPORT

FIELD STUDY OF REFUGEE COMMISSION

September, 1955

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### FIELD STUDY OF REFUGEE COMMISSION

The first major field study undertaken by the personnel of the Field Administration Project, Michigan State University Team, took place from September 1 to September 13, 1955. The Field Administration Project under the direction of Deputy Advisor Walter Mode has as its central purpose the strengthening of administration outside of Saigon. Within the framework of this general purpose, research was undertaken on the field operations of the Commissariat for Refugees with a view to making procedural and organizational recommendations which might improve the field operations of the Commission.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY. Within one week after the arrival of members of the MSU team concerned with field administration, the team was requested to assist and advise in the Refugee Program. First conversations were with Mr. A. Cardinaux, USOM Resettlement Division, but within a few days contacts were made within the Commission itself and the Commissioner General extended a friendly and warm invitation to make suggestions on the administrative structure of the Commission. The Commission had recently shifted from a general relief and assistance program to a rehabilitation and resettlement phase, and in order to fulfill its new role, the Commission had decided to operate on a project basis. Funds were to be disbursed by the Commission only for specific rehabilitation projects rather than for direct relief. In order to meet the requirements of this new type of operation, it was thought that new procedures and organization might be necessary.

From August 1 to August 6, 1955, a series of interviews were held within the Commission by members of the Michigan State Team. Chiefs of the various bureaus and directorates within the Saigon office of the Commissariat were formally interviewed. This study of the central office operation of the Commission resulted in the report to the Commissioner-General of August 6, 1955, which was warmly received. After some discussion, the Commissioner-General voiced general acceptance of all recommendations in the report and made plans to carry out the suggested changes.

This portion of the work was preliminary, however, to fulfilling the major purpose, that of assisting in the improvement of the field service of the Commissariat. On September 1, the research phase of this broader program objective got under way. This is a report on the research itself; the recommendations resulting from the study have already been submitted. It is hoped that during the coming months, the team will be able to assist in the adaptation and implementation of these recommendations.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY. Most members of the team participating in the Refugee Commission Field Study were new arrivals in Viet Nam. None of the researchers had had sufficient time to gain a general background of the operations of the Commission or of the scope and nature of the refugee situation throughout the country. Obviously, the specific data needed to make recommendations were not known to the team either. Research, in this case, had to serve not only the function of gathering specific data but also the function of gathering the most general information. Both of these were objectives of the research.

The third objective of the research phase is of a totally different nature. Our experience in the central office of the Commission indicated that the interviewing technique tended to stimulate self-analysis and encourage thinking about problems in a considerably different way than officials were accustomed to in everyday

activities. In other words, it was hoped that the research phase itself would have a certain therapeutic value. This was the third objective of the study, and conversations with Refugee Commission personnel since the research was completed indicated that in their judgement, it was achieved.

Methods. Research on the Refugee Commission was definitely a team operation with the Deputy Advisor for Field Administration working closely with the Research Coordinator and Coordinator for In-Service Training throughout the study. The Commission, and the Resettlement Division and the Field Staff of USOM extended excellent cooperation at all times. This concentrated activity shortened the period of research considerably and made it possible to submit preliminary recommendations seventeen days after the study began. Since the refugee program is an emergency operation, this speed was essential.

Researchers were sent into the various provinces with refugee problems and interviews were conducted in the provincial headquarters and in refugee villages. The provinces studied were selected because they had the most refugees. Fourteen provinces in South and Central Viet Nam and in the P.M.S. were visited, including Gia Dinh, Bien Hoa, Tay Ninh, Mytho, Tan An, Bentre, Cholon, and Long Xuyen in the South; Donnai in the P.M.S.; and Binh Thuan, Khanh Hoa, Quang Tri, Thua Thien, and Quang Nam in Central Viet Nam. Provincial officials in these provinces were interviewed; refugee centers were visited; and refugee leaders in forty-three villages were interviewed. (See two appended interview guides.)

Though these interviews were the major source of our information, they were amply supplemented by data contributed by both USOM and the Commission. Facts and figures were supplied whenever requested, and many informal conversations in both the offices of the Commission and of USOM contributed to our general information about the refugee situation.

RESEARCH FINDINGS. Since the major results of the research have already been passed on to the Commissioner-General in the form of a series of recommendations, this report will include only some of the factual material uncovered through interviewing. Most of the general background information collected would be of little interest in this report because it is so well known to people involved in refugee affairs in Viet Nam. Indeed, our contributions in that regard would be small compared to the general information collected over the months by USOM and other American personnel who have dealt with refugee problems since they began. Perhaps the findings of our survey, however, might be some contribution to the general fund of knowledge. Of course, both general information and specific findings contributed to the recommendations of September 20, 1955.

1. Concentration of the Refugee Problem in Specific Provinces. One of the striking facts of the refugee situation is that out of thirty-nine provinces in Free Viet Nam, the refugee population and problem is concentrated in relatively few. As Commission or USOM statistics readily reveal, only five provinces in the South and one in South Central Viet Nam contain more than 30,000 refugees. These six provinces -- Bien Hoa (128,968), Gia Dinh (115,535), Cho Lon (51,546), My Tho (46,320), Tay Ninh (40,153), and Binh Thuan (37,112) -- are concentrated relatively close to Saigon. The only other areas having an appreciable number of refugees are Tourane (22,410), Thu Dau Mot (18,616), Blao (14,176), Ben Tre (13,700), Quang Tri (13,060), and Khanh Hoa (12,083). All other provinces have less than ten thousand and most of them have only a few thousand or less.

It is obvious that the political, military and transportation situation at the time of the arrival of the refugees explains this pattern. However, this difference in concentration affects the administration of refugee affairs in several ways. First of all, the dimensions of the problem in Central Viet Nam and the P.M.S. as compared to the South are considerably different. Quang Tri province in Central Viet Nam appears to be heavily populated with refugees when compared to other provinces in Central Viet Nam, yet its situation does not begin to compare to the province of Bien Hoa or Gia Dinh or the others in the South. It is easy to see that the problems facing the Commission and provincial authorities in the South have been of different dimensions than those in other regions.

A second effect of this concentration is that because of the totally different dimensions of the problem in one province as compared to another, different types of administrative organizations are called for to meet the emergency. In some provinces there are no refugees at all; in others, the problems appear to be manageable within the framework of existing authorities; while in others, the situation appears to be beyond the capacity of the present organization. Many of the provinces received several times the number of refugees they predicted they could absorb, and in at least one province, Bien Hoa, the total population of the province doubled with the immigration of refugees.

A third effect is that the crowded refugee situation in one province and an under-population in another will call for resettlement of refugee villages from one province to another in some cases. This means that the Refugee Commission must continue to maintain central coordinating facilities which can manage such transfer projects. Provincial and field administrative organizations are not enough.

2. General Lack of Project Orientation. Generally speaking we found little evidence that the existing organization in the field was thinking in terms of rehabilitation projects. It is true that in specific villages and provinces some thinking had gone into developing projects, but these were the exception rather than the rule. Furthermore, most of this thinking had not progressed beyond the first stages.

As an example of the type of project thinking that was occasionally evidenced, in Gia Dinh, where provincial officials were faced with ten times the number of refugees they had asked for, officials described an area of the province that could be developed as an arts and crafts center for making paper, leatherwork, and clothing, and where sugar could be refined. Saigon could be the market for this mammoth project which could accommodate 100,000 refugees. Very little thinking had gone into such questions as land acquisition, refugee skills and training, costs of resettlement and retraining, costs of road construction for marketing the products, possible saturation of the market, and other pertinent questions which would have to be thought through before the project could take specific shape. On the other hand, the suggested project in Gia Dinh was promising in that it demonstrated that at least some persons at the province committee level were thinking in terms of projects. This was the exception rather than the rule.

Within the villages, refugee leaders were very familiar with what they considered the needs of their followers. In fact, there was ample evidence that within individual villages enough thinking had gone into the requirements of rehabilitation of the village to be encouraging for the project approach. That is, with some guidance and assistance in formulating project plans, a large number of the villages visited could be ready with rehabilitation projects in a short time. Of course, such proposals would require careful review, but the beginnings of self-examination and appraisal of needs were clearly in evidence.

The implications of these facts to the organization and procedures of the Refugee Commission are clear. Attention must be devoted to orienting refugee officials to the project approach; and means must be found to stimulate and assist villagers in formulating their plans. Suggestions to achieve these ends are contained in our report to the Commissioner-General.

3. Disparities in the Level of Self-Sufficiency. In each province and village questions were asked about the level of self-sufficiency achieved by the refugees. Of course, different people have different ideas about what self-sufficiency consists of, and it was clear as some of the interviews progressed that some officials and leaders were thinking in terms of the level of living in homes in the North. In spite of this, however, it is possible to state a few generalizations which have implications for the field administration of the Refugee Commission.

Generally speaking, self-sufficiency was approached to a greater extent in Central Viet Nam than in the South. This was particularly true of fishing villages, but it was true of others as well. This is probably a result of the smaller number of refugee villages in the central provinces, but it may be caused by other factors as well. In several instances, we found villages in Central Viet Nam which had a higher level of living than was enjoyed in the North, and yet these were still classified as "refugee" villages. In a few cases, refugees were living better than people in surrounding permanent villages.

About half of the villages reported less than one-third self-sufficiency, and twelve reported no self-sufficiency. There is some question as to how reliable a finding such as this may be, given a possible desire to distort the picture of "self-sufficiency" and the varied meaning of this term. However, generally speaking, the lot of the refugee is still a dismal one in most villages, and much work is needed before rehabilitation and resettlement can be said to be complete. Where the problems are still most severe--in the six provinces with large refugee populations--the situation required emergency action and could not be turned over to existing provincial authorities until a higher level of self-sufficiency had been attained.

4. Provincial Organization for Refugee Affairs. In every province visited during the study, either the province chief or one of his deputies was chairman of a province committee for refugee affairs. Beyond this one point of similarity, the organizations within the various provinces differed considerably. These variations do not seem to run parallel to variations in the types of refugee problems faced in the province, but seem to depend instead on the views of the province chief.

The usual pattern consists of a committee of from five to fifteen men with jurisdiction over all refugee affairs within the province. Usually one official is charged with the everyday activity concerning refugees, and he was usually present during interviews at provincial headquarters. An office staff assists this official on refugee affairs, and as many as half of the staff is paid for by the Commission in Saigon.

Perhaps the pattern in some specific provinces (Table I) will illustrate the general organization as well as the points of diversity.

Table I

## Provincial Organizations for Refugee Affairs

| <u>Province</u>      | <u>Size of<br/>Refugee<br/>Committee</u> | <u>Composition</u>                              | <u>Functions</u>                                                 | <u>Meetings</u>        |
|----------------------|------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Gia Dinh             | 13 + chiefs of<br>technical<br>services  | 4 district<br>chiefs<br>4 refugees<br>4 priests | project and<br>policy<br>decisions                               | no informa-<br>tion    |
| Binh Thuan           | 6--plan to add<br>18 refugees            | technicians<br>at present                       | housing and<br>relief<br>problems                                | no informa-<br>tion    |
| Bien Hoa             | 11                                       | 5 priests<br>5 refugees                         | all refugee<br>problems                                          | once a month           |
| Quang Tri            | 17                                       | mostly parish<br>priests                        | all refugee<br>questions                                         | once a month           |
| Tay Ninh             | 12                                       | 4 refugees,<br>technicians,<br>2 Cao Dai        | Province Chief decides all matters,<br>and committee never meets |                        |
| Da Nang<br>(Tourane) | 21                                       | technicians,<br>some priests                    | all refugee<br>problems                                          | no regular<br>meetings |
| Long Xuyen           | 5                                        | refugees and<br>one priest                      | distributions                                                    | often as<br>necessary  |
| Mytho                | 9                                        | 3 technicians<br>5 priests                      | general admin-<br>istration                                      | no informa-<br>tion    |

5. Village Organization. Several observations can be made on refugee village government. First, some very intricate systems of organization had been worked out within the village. As Table II indicates some of the villages were divided, subdivided, and arranged in a variety of ways for governmental purposes. The usual pattern consisted of a central committee with jurisdiction over all matters in the village. Committee members were almost always elected. Frequently they had specific operations to perform and occasionally they represented specific districts within the village. In every case administration of village affairs centered in this committee.

As for leadership within the village, the spiritual leader dominates. In most cases, the priest is not a formal member of the elected committee, however. He serves as advisor in most villages when he is not a member. It is the spiritual leader who serves as the leader in village decision making and problem solving. In almost every case he was the one who dealt with authorities in Saigon or the province on village matters.

This clearly identified leadership pattern and the nucleus of administrative organization found in the village committee have implications for resettlement.

Table II

## Refugee Village Organization in Twenty Selected Villages

| <u>Province<br/>in Which<br/>Village<br/>Is Located</u> | <u>Size and<br/>Composition<br/>of Village<br/>Committee</u> | <u>Functions<br/>Performed<br/>by Committee</u> | <u>Role of<br/>Spiritual<br/>Leader</u> | <u>Comments</u>               |
|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| My Tho                                                  | 4 provisional members                                        | administration                                  | leader                                  | former comm. members arrested |
| My Tho                                                  | 3--1 priest                                                  | requests, complaints                            | no formal position                      | also 12-man advisory          |
| My Tho                                                  | none                                                         | general admin.                                  | makes position decisions                | no comm. because no money     |
| Bien Hoa                                                | 3--1 priest                                                  | administration                                  | comm. member                            | whole village meets           |
| Bien Hoa                                                | 5--no priests                                                | execute orders from Saigon                      | no formal position                      | - - -                         |
| Ben Tre                                                 | 3--1 priest                                                  | administration                                  | comm. president                         | village divided in sections   |
| Ben Tre                                                 | 3--1 priest                                                  | administration                                  | comm. president                         | - - -                         |
| Tay Ninh                                                | 5--2 Cao Dai                                                 | administration                                  | Cao Dai priests on comm.                | under Cao Dai                 |
| Tay Ninh                                                | not clear                                                    | administration                                  | Cao Dai leader of comm.                 | whole village meets           |
| Long Xuyen                                              | 3                                                            | administration                                  | spiritual advisor                       | - - -                         |
| Long Xuyen                                              | 3--1 priest                                                  | health, welfare and security                    | president of comm.                      | village organized in sections |
| Bia Dinh                                                | 3                                                            | administration                                  | advisor                                 | whole village meets           |
| Binh Thuan                                              | 3--provisional                                               | administration                                  | "supreme advisor"                       | expect comm. in 2 months      |
| Dalat (PMS)                                             | 8                                                            | divide land, administration                     | - - -                                   | Protestant camp               |
| Da Nang                                                 | 3                                                            | administration                                  | supreme councillor                      | - - -                         |
| Quang Nam                                               | 3                                                            | administration                                  | advisor                                 | - - -                         |
| Thua Thien                                              | 5                                                            | administration                                  | advisor                                 | whole village meets           |
| Thua Thien                                              | 3                                                            | administration and security                     | advisor                                 | village organized in sections |
| Quang Tri                                               | 3                                                            | administration and resettlement                 | advisor                                 | - - -                         |
| Quang Tri                                               | 7                                                            | administration                                  | informal advisor                        | - - -                         |

If anything they should in most cases make it easier to develop and carry out rehabilitation projects. Furthermore, the tendency to elect leaders is a good sign for the development of democratic institutions. On the other hand, the heavy reliance on spiritual leadership may too severely restrict the planning of the village. This may be offset by the Commission's interest in developing young lay leaders and occasional evidence that this may be coming about in some small measure.

One comment based on the impressions of the interviewers is probably in order here. It was generally agreed upon that, while many factors influence the progress demonstrated in individual villages, one factor of great importance was the individual leadership qualities of the spiritual leader of the village. Certainly, such factors as date of arrival, available land, water, fertilizer and animal availability and others play an important role in determining the level of self-sufficiency. But it seemed equally clear in some of the villages that the priest with a plan for his village, with a clear idea of what was wanted, with some administrative and political understanding had a distinct advantage in providing for the welfare of his followers.

6. Availability of Technicians. When the question of technicians was raised, most provincial authorities indicated a general scarcity of technical persons for refugee affairs. Quang Tri, Ben Tre, Mytho, Bien Hoa, Da Nang, and Tay Ninh authorities said they had no technicians for refugee affairs. In no province are there enough technicians to do the job of rehabilitation. Only Gia Dinh indicated that they did not feel a shortage of technicians, because provincial leaders felt they could call on technical persons in Saigon if it became necessary. In Long Xuyen provincial authorities said that provincial services assisted in the refugee program whenever needed. However, because of technician shortages or for other reasons, this was not the pattern described in other areas. In Tay Ninh, for example, provincial authorities said that they could make no provincial technical personnel available because there was so much to do along regular lines.

This general lack of technical personnel, which was already well known to the Commission, may well pose one of the most serious problems in project development and implementation. Our suggestions to the Commissioner-General have taken this fact into account.

7. Village Communications. While the usual pattern of communication between village and Commission flowed through district, province, and Commission Delegee where these units were designated for refugee matters, one very serious deviation was found. As can be discovered by observing visitors to the Commission in Saigon, a constant procession of spiritual leaders makes its way directly to the central office in Saigon. This was readily admitted by all concerned--the village leaders, provincial and other authorities. According to the villagers this was the most effective way to support requests. In Saigon, contacts were through religious liaison persons in the Commission or through officials in the Commission.

This direct contact with Saigon was found to be very common throughout the South, and it was the dominant communication pattern in provinces very close to the city. Since the priests were frequently successful in their direct relationships, provincial authorities were bypassed and administrative problems resulted. In the provinces, it meant ineffective planning, record keeping and controls. In the central office of the Commission, it meant much time consumed in handling individual village problems and requests and less time for important general matters. As was pointed out above, because so many refugee villages are located in the provinces

near Saigon, this is a problem of considerable proportions, and it will have to be solved before more efficient administration can be instituted.

8. Village Needs and Problems. In each village we asked about the problems that would have to be solved before the village could be considered self-sufficient. As was mentioned above, it was encouraging to find that in some villages thinking had progressed to the point where specific plans and projects might be worked out in the near future. In every instance, however, there was at least some consideration of village needs, probably stimulated by their own situation as well as the previous visits of Commission and USOM personnel making somewhat similar inquiries. Table III presents a summary of these needs.

Table III

Refugee Village Needs for Rehabilitation, by Region

|                                     | <u>South</u> | <u>Central</u> | <u>P.M.S.</u> | <u>Total</u> |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|----------------|---------------|--------------|
| <u>Subsistence-type requests:</u>   |              |                |               |              |
| Land                                | 11           | 2              | 1             | 14           |
| Security                            | 5            | 3              | -             | 8            |
| Raw Materials (handicrafts)         | 5            | 1              | -             | 6            |
| Food                                | 5            | 1              | 1             | 7            |
| Water                               | 2            | 1              | 1             | 4            |
| Money for housing                   | 2            | 2              | 1             | 5            |
| <u>Services beyond subsistence:</u> |              |                |               |              |
| Money for coops                     | 2            | 2              | 1             | 5            |
| Markets                             | 2            | -              | -             | 2            |
| Transportation                      | 3            | 2              | 1             | 6            |
| School supplies, etc.               | 3            | 10             | 2             | 15           |
| <u>Equipment:</u>                   |              |                |               |              |
| Fishing equipment                   | 1            | 2              | -             | 3            |
| Farming equipment                   | 5            | 7              | 1             | 13           |
| Medical supplies                    | 4            | 2              | 1             | 7            |

The subsistence-type requests were found relatively more frequently in the South than in Central Viet Nam, as can be seen in Table III. The request for land was one of the most persistent of all, but it was not heard as frequently outside of the South where refugee farmers have frequently had to turn to woodcutting, or

other occupations for a meager sub-standard subsistence. Villages in Central Viet Nam, on the other hand, were already thinking of schools and money to pay school-teachers. This verified our observations based on other data that the South had a longer way to go to achieve self-sufficiency.

Requests for farming equipment in Central Viet Nam were requests for water buffalo for the most part. Transportation requests were frequently for a means of transporting firewood or other products to market. Of course, the questionnaires themselves detail the general information contained in Table III, and they may be of some use in supplementing the excellent fund of knowledge already collected in the survey by the Resettlement Division and the Field Service (USOM). This earlier survey was more exhaustive on this particular point.

If any general summary statement of research findings is possible, it is, perhaps, that great diversity prevails throughout the refugee situation. The diversity of problems, organizational structure and procedure, and the level of self-sufficiency attained is a striking fact as one delves into refugee affairs and administration. Much imagination, flexibility and constant reappraisal will be needed to administer successfully an emergency program containing so many variations. We hope that this report, the more detailed data contained in the questionnaires themselves, and the report to the Commissioner-General with suggestions based on this research will be of some assistance in meeting the challenge.

September, 1955

FIELD STUDY: REFUGEE COMMISSION  
INTERVIEW GUIDE  
(Village Level)

Interview with:

Report by:

Date:

Place:

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We will be seeking information within the following general categories in each of our interviews. Under some of the categories, several questions are suggested for possible use by the interviewer depending on the particular situation. In any case, the categories below are those within which we want to compile detailed information.

I. Characteristics of this village.

- A. Number of refugees
- B. Former location
- C. Occupations, skills
- D. Other characteristics: religion, types of housing, level of self-sufficiency, etc.)

II. Village administrative organization. (Names, former and present occupations, ages, other characteristics of committeemen. Are there other village organizations in addition to the formal village committee? Are new leaders being developed formally or informally in village plus probing questions.)

III. Administrative procedures within village?

- A. Village government. Does the village meet in formal sessions to express their views? What complaint procedure exists? Who decides what should be done within the village and how is this decided?
- B. Record-keeping. What records are kept within the village (financial and other) and who keeps them?
- C. Function of the committee. What does the committee do (and individual members of the committee)?

IV. Relationships to other administrative units of government. (Responsibilities, communications, formal and informal contacts and arrangements.)

- A. To Province government
- B. To other units of local government within the Province
- C. To Refugee Commission in Saigon
- D. To other ministries in Saigon
- E. To Regional Delegates
- F. To other refugee villages

V. Major Problems of this village.

- A. What are the most important problems of this village?
- B. What changes in administrative channels, procedures, or organization might facilitate solving these problems?
- C. Do you have any suggestions for speeding the complete rehabilitation of the village?
- D. Do you have any plans at present for developing a project which would hasten the rehabilitation of this village?

VI. Do you have any other information you would like to give us that would help us understand the refugee program?

September, 1955

FIELD STUDY: REFUGEE COMMISSION  
INTERVIEW GUIDE  
(Provincial Level)

Interview with:

Report by:

Date:

Place:

We will be seeking information within the following general categories in each of our interviews. Under some of the categories, several questions are suggested for possible use by the interviewer depending on the particular situation. In any case, the categories below are those within which we want to compile detailed information.

I. Characteristics of Refugee Situation in Province.

- A. How many refugees are located with this province?
- B. Where in general are they located (size and location of major camps)?
- C. What progress has been made to date in the resettlement and rehabilitation of refugees in this province?
- D. What are the major roadblocks remaining which are holding back rehabilitation and resettlement?

II. Composition of Provincial Committee. (Names and titles of members, size of staff serving the committee, composition of staff, method selecting members of committee, number of meetings held each month)

III. Function of Committee.

- A. What does the Provincial committee do? (What are its legal responsibilities? What does it actually do each day, week, month?)
- B. What is the role or function of the individual members of the committee (Both in their positions on the committee and their positions within provincial government)?

IV. Organization and Procedure.

- A. What is the pattern of organization within the province in matters dealing with refugees?
- B. What are the procedures on requests, complaints and reports?
- C. What procedure is followed in developing projects for resettlement and rehabilitation? What procedure is to be followed in implementing these projects?

V. Relationships to other administrative units of Government. (Responsibilities, communications, informal and formal contacts and arrangements)

- A. To various governmental ministries in Saigon.
- B. To Refugee Commission in Saigon.
- C. To province government
- D. To units of local government below the province.
- E. To regional delegates
- F. To refugee villages.

VI. Technicians. (What technical experts are available to you in dealing with refugee affairs? What is their relationship to you your employees, borrowed, temporary, permanent)?

VII. Suggestions for improvement of organization. (Can you suggest any ways in which the organization for handling the rehabilitation of refugees can be improved here in the province? Have you observed any administrative bottlenecks developing in the way the present system operates?)

VIII. Record Keeping. (What types of records including financial do you keep? How is statistical data compiled and transmitted? What problems of record-keeping have you encountered?)

IX. Are there any other observations you would like to make which might be of help in our understanding of refugee work in the field?