No Solutions in Sight: the Problem of Protracted Refugee Situations in Africa

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Introduction

In 2001, UNHCR's Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit (EPAU) embarked upon a major study of protracted refugee situations, with funding provided by the US State Department's Bureau for Population, Refugees and Migration.[2] Since that time, the notion of protracted refugee situations has become an increasingly familiar feature of the discourse on international refugee issues, especially in the African context.[3]

Hitherto, however, a general analysis of this important humanitarian issue has been lacking. The current paper, which provides a synthesis of findings from the case studies and literature review undertaken by EPAU over the past two years, is intended to fill that gap.

A definition

While the notion of protracted refugee situations is now commonly used by UNHCR, the concept has never been formally defined or elaborated by the organization. For the purposes of this paper, refugees can be regarded as being in a protracted situation when they have lived in exile for more than five years, and when they still have no immediate prospect of finding a durable solution to their plight by means of voluntary repatriation, local integration, or resettlement.[4]

In simpler terms, refugees in protracted situations find themselves trapped in a state of limbo: they cannot go back to their homeland, in most cases because it is not safe for them to do so; they are unable to settle permanently in their country of first asylum, because the host state does not want them to remain indefinitely on its territory; and they do not have the option of moving on, as no third country has agreed to admit them and to provide them with permanent residence rights.

This paper, it should be noted, confines its definition to those situations in which refugees are living in camps, organized settlements and in designated geographical zones. It does not look

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[1] This paper is written in a personal capacity and does not represent the views of UNHCR.

[2] The studies undertaken and commissioned by EPAU are available on the Evaluation and Policy Analysis page of the UNHCR website, <www.unhcr.ch>, under 'Evaluation reports' and 'New Issues in Refugee Research'. The author wishes to thank his UNHCR colleagues, Arafat Jamal, Bruno Geddo and Sylvester Awuye for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper, and to thank all those who have contributed case studies to EPAU's protracted refugee situations project.

[3] In December 2001, for example, a ministerial meeting on protracted refugee situations in Africa was convened by UNHCR in Geneva.

[4] The five-year cut-off period is admittedly a somewhat arbitrary one, and is not always easy to apply in practice, given the fluid nature of many refugee situations.

at the circumstances of those long-term refugees who have settled independently in rural or urban areas, and who in general receive little or no assistance from UNHCR or any other humanitarian organization.

Africa's long-term refugees

Protracted refugee situations are to be found in most parts of the world, with the general exception of Central and South America. But by far the majority of these situations are to be found in Africa.

While it is difficult to provide definitive figures on this matter, it would appear that some three million African refugees found themselves in such circumstances at the end of 2001, when UNHCR published its last set of global refugee statistics.[5] These included:

- 400,000 Angolan refugees in Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)
- 520,000 Burundi refugees in Tanzania 275,000 DRC refugees in Angola, Congo-Brazzaville, Tanzania and Zambia
- 325,000 Eritrean refugees in Sudan
- 210,000 Liberian refugees in Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea and Sierra Leone
- 165,000 Sahrawi refugees in Algeria
- 150,000 Sierra Leonean refugees in Guinea and Liberia
- 300,000 Somali refugees in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Yemen
- 450,000 Sudanese refugees in Central African Republic (CAR), Chad, DRC, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda

It would be misleading to give the impression that the problem of protracted refugee situations is entirely new. Indeed, some 17 years ago, the Refugee Policy Group produced an extensive report titled 'Older refugee settlements in Africa', which underlined the fact that many of the continent's refugees had lived in exile for many years.[6] It is the contention of this paper, however, that the circumstances and conditions of Africa's long-term refugees have changed significantly - and in almost every respect changed for the worse - over the past two decades.

Causes of protracted refugee situations

Why have so many refugee situations in Africa persisted for such long periods of time, leaving millions of uprooted people without any immediate prospect of a solution to their plight? The answer to this question can be found in a number of different, but interrelated factors.

Conflict and non-intervention

First and most obviously, a large proportion of Africa's refugee situations have become protracted because the armed conflicts which originally forced people to leave their own country have dragged on for so many years, making it impossible for them to return to their homeland.

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[5] For a broader discussion of the many difficulties associated with the enumeration of refugee populations, see Crisp (1999).
[6] Refugee Policy Group (1985).

In this respect, it should be recalled that almost all of the wars that have affected the continent in recent years - Angola, Burundi, DRC, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Somalia, for example - have been characterized by intense ethnic and communal antagonisms, high levels of organized violence and destruction, as well as the deliberate targeting and displacement of civilian populations. In many of these armed conflicts, moreover, the fighting has been sustained by the fact that various actors - politicians, the military, warlords, militia groups, local entrepreneurs and international business concerns - have a vested economic interest in the continuation of armed conflict.

Wars, human rights abuses and protracted refugee situations have also become endemic in parts of Africa because of the international community's failure to bring them to an end. In this respect, an instructive comparison can be made with Northern Iraq, Bosnia, Kosovo and East Timor - four armed conflicts which produced (eventually) a decisive response from the world's more prosperous states, enabling large-scale and relatively speedy repatriation movements to take place.

In each of these situations, the US and its allies had strategic interests to defend, not least a desire to avert the destabilizing consequences of mass population displacements. In Africa, however, the geopolitical and economic stakes have generally been much lower for the industrialized states, with the result that armed conflicts - and the refugee situations created by those conflicts - have been allowed to persist for years on end.

Repatriation and integration

The presence of so many protracted refugee situations in Africa can be linked to the fact that countries of asylum, donor states, UNHCR and other actors have given so little attention to the solution of local integration during the past 15 years. Indeed, from the mid-1980s onwards, a consensus was forged around the notion that repatriation - normally but not necessarily on a voluntary basis - was the only viable solution to refugee problems in Africa and other low-income regions.

Why exactly did repatriation emerge as the preferred solution to Africa's refugee problems in the 1980s and 1990s? And why did the alternative approaches of local integration and local settlement disappear from the agenda?[7] Such issues have been examined in detail elsewhere, and do not warrant an extensive discussion in this paper.[8] Suffice it to say that the 'repatriation rather than integration' approach assumed such dominance for a variety of reasons:

- because earlier efforts to promote local settlement and self-reliance in Africa's rural refugee settlements had achieved very limited results;

- because refugees were increasingly regarded as an economic and environmental burden on the countries which hosted them;

- because African countries with large refugee populations felt that the burden they had accepted was not being adequately shared by the world's more prosperous states;

- because many refugee-hosting countries in Africa had declining economies, growing populations and were themselves affected by conflict, instability;

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[7] These issues are addressed in Jacobsen (2001).
[8] See, for example, Chimni (1999), Crisp (2000a) and Rutinwa (1999).

- because refugees came to be regarded (especially after the Great Lakes crisis) as a threat to local, national and even regional security, especially in situations where they were mixed with armed and criminal elements; and,

- because the post-cold war democratization process in some African states meant that politicians had an interest in mobilizing electoral support on the basis of xenophobic and anti-refugee sentiments.

In combination, the variables listed above contrived to bring about a situation where very few refugees in Africa (especially those in organized camps and settlements) were given any encouragement to remain and settle in their country of asylum. And yet it was precisely at this time that the changing nature of conflict in the continent made speedy and voluntary repatriation an increasingly elusive solution for so many refugees.[9]

Rather than responding to this impasse in innovative ways, the principal members of the international refugee regime (host and donor countries, UNHCR and NGOs) chose to implement long-term 'care-and-maintenance' programmes which did little or nothing to promote self-reliance amongst refugees or to facilitate positive interactions between the exiled and local populations. According to some critics, this was partly because UNHCR, as well as governmental and non-governmental refugee agencies, had a vested interest in perpetuating the 'relief model' of refugee assistance, which entailed the establishment of large, highly visible and internationally funded camps, administered entirely separately from the surrounding area and population.[10]

'Residual caseloads'

Some of the people who find themselves in protracted refugee situations are members of 'residual caseloads' - those who decide to remain in exile when other members of the same population have been able to repatriate, resettle or become locally integrated in their country of asylum.

To give just one example of this phenomenon, large numbers of Liberian refugees returned to their own country at the end of the 1990s, when a new government had been elected and the country was relatively peaceful. Nevertheless, sizeable numbers of Liberian refugees have chosen to remain in countries of asylum such as Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana and Guinea.

Why do some refugees choose not to go home, even when conditions in their country of origin appear to have stabilized? This phenomenon is again a result of several different factors:

- because 'residual caseload' refugees have a continuing and legitimate fear of persecution in their own country, or because they come from minority groups which are at risk of other forms of harassment and discrimination;

- because the degree of destruction in the refugees' place of origin is so great that the people concerned do not feel that they will be able to survive at home;

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[9] It should also be noted that the other solution to refugee problems - resettlement to a third country - has not been available to significant numbers of African refugees. Between 1992 and 2001, some 90,000 African refugees were resettled in other parts of the world, a tiny proportion of the continent's refugee population.

[10] See, for example, Harrell-Bond (2002).

- because the circumstances which originally forced people to become refugees were so traumatic that they cannot return to their country of origin, even if they would not be at risk if they were to repatriate;

- because they lack the capital required to make the journey home and to make ends meet during the initial process of reintegration:

- because the 'residual caseload' refugees are too old, too young or too sick to embark upon what will inevitably be a very arduous repatriation and reintegration process;

- because the refugees have close ethnic, linguistic, social or economic links with the local population and the country of asylum;

- because refugees who remain in a country of asylum may enjoy better access to education, health services and resettlement opportunities than those who return to their country of origin[11]; and,

- because certain refugee groups may choose to remain in exile and to pursue their political objectives from the country which has granted them asylum.

Political hostages

In some parts of Africa, the search for durable solutions to refugee problems has been complicated and delayed by the political, military and economic interests of key actors.

Analyzing the situation of Sahrawi refugees in Algeria, for example, Van Bruaene argues that Tindouf region, where the refugee camps are to be found, "was obviously selected for political and military, rather than humanitarian reasons." "In some protracted situations," he suggests, "elderly charismatic and historical leaderships tend to embody rigid political agenda, needlessly detrimental to the well-being of their own vulnerable refugee population." "A good example," he continues, "is that although Tindouf is totally unsuitable for supporting a refugee population of 165,000, any idea of temporary scattering to more fertile areas is unmentionable."[12]

The large numbers of Eritrean refugees who remained in Sudan after their country of origin became independent in 1992 provides another example of the way in which refugees can become hostages to fortune. Initially, large-scale repatriation was delayed by the scale of the devastation that had taken place in Eritrea, the refugees' caution in returning to such conditions, and the need for discussions with the new government concerning the repatriation and reintegration effort. According to some commentators, the new government was concerned that the mainly Muslim refugees, many of whom had been exposed to Islamic fundamentalism in Sudan, might have a destabilizing effect on the country.

In 1993, after some very difficult negotiations, the Eritrean authorities and the United Nations agreed upon a $260 million repatriation and reintegration programme for refugees in Sudan, and in November 1994, UNHCR launched a six-month pilot project involving the return of 25,000 Eritreans. While the pilot project is generally considered to have been a success, the

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[11] Sommers (2002), for example, highlights the fact that the educational facilities and opportunities that are available to refugees in Kakuma camp in Kenya are far superior to those available in southern Sudan. Even if a lasting peace could be established in Sudan, it seems very probable that some refugees would choose to remain in Kenya for this reason.

[12] Van Bruaene (2001) p. 17.

organized repatriation movement quickly became stalled, largely as a result of two factors: the deteriorating relationship between the Sudanese and Eritrean governments, which eventually led to a rupture of diplomatic relations; and growing insecurity in the border area, resulting from clashes between the Sudanese armed forces and a rebel group.

Characteristics of protracted refugee situations in Africa

One must be cautious in making generalizations about protracted refugee situations in Africa, as each of these situations has its own history, dynamics and peculiarities. Nevertheless, on the basis of the case studies undertaken and reviewed by UNHCR's Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit, it is possible to identify some features which are common to many of the continent's protracted refugee situations.

Geographical location

One of the most evident characteristics of Africa's protracted refugee situations is that they are usually to be found in peripheral border areas of asylum countries: places which are insecure, where the climatic conditions are harsh, which are not a high priority for the central government and for development actors, and which are consequently very poor.

The areas which accommodate the continent's Sudanese refugees are typical in this respect. Mboki in the Central African Republic, for example, is about 1,300 kilometres by road from the capital city of Bangui - four days drive in the dry season. When a UNHCR mission visited the area in April 2002, it found that the local hospital has closed down, other regular health services had ceased to function, and the schools were not closed. The mission was only allowed to visit the area after lengthy discussions in Bangui and on condition that it was continually accompanied by two armed escorts.[13]

According to Merkx, the part of northern Uganda where Sudanese refugees have been accommodated "has a history of economic underdevelopment. There is hardly any socio-economic infrastructure, markets are isolated and large investments are scarce. The local economy has been hampered by lack of relations with the centre... Transport is unreliable and often interrupted by insecurity and bad roads.[14] Substantiating this statement, in August and September 2002, the Lords Resistance Army (LRA), a rebel group based in southern Sudan and northern Uganda, launched four attacks on the Sudanese camps, displacing some 30,000 refugees.

In Kenya, the situation is little different. As the author of this paper has written elsewhere, the Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps "are both located in remote and semi-arid areas, sparsely populated by desperately poor nomadic pastoralists. They are almost totally devoid of an investment or development activity... The border areas of north-west and north-east Kenya have always been insecure and weakly governed, characterized by banditry, cattle rustling and insurgency, as well as violent clashes between the Kenyan army and local armed groups."[15]

It is not just the Sudanese refugees who experience such conditions. Van Bruaene, for examples, writes that in the Sahrawi refugee camps of Tindouf, Algeria, "temperatures are extreme, the ground is made of dust and rocks, almost completely barren, and mostly unfit for

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[13] Ketel (2002) p. 2.

[14] Merkx (2000) p. 9.

[15] Crisp (2000) p. 618.

crops or fodder. Sand storms are frequent. All mechanical equipment and spare parts have to be brought in from Algiers or Oran, 1,600 kilometres away. The sad reality is that the area of Tindouf is totally unsuitable for supporting a refugee population of 165,000.[16]

A final example of this phenomenon can be found in Yemen, which has accommodated a substantial population of Somali refugees since the early 1990s. According to Jawahir Adam, who visited the camps on behalf of UNHCR:

> If one could choose the worst location for a refugee camp in the world, Kharaz camp definitely qualifies. It is in one of the hottest areas in Yemen, with a temperature varying from 20 to over 45 degrees centigrade. The camp is approximately 102 kilometres from Aden and takes about three hours to reach. The road is rough and can be treacherous. Security is unpredictable and an armed escort is imperative to and from the camp. The camp is so isolated that it is extremely difficult for refugees to socialise with others or to seek employment opportunities.[17]

Demographic structure

A second characteristic of Africa's long-term refugee camps and settlements is that they tend to be populated by a large proportion of people with special needs, such as children and adolescents, women, and the elderly.

The Nakivale refugee camp in Uganda, for example, currently accommodates around 15,000 refugees (mainly from Rwanda and the DRC), of whom 10,000 are under the age of 14.[18] In Kenya's Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps, just over half of the population are aged below 18, while the figure stands at some 58 per cent in the older settlements for Burundian refugees in Tanzania.[19] In Algeria, the Tindouf refugee camps "have always been inhabited almost exclusively by vulnerable refugees: women, children, and the elderly. They are almost entirely devoid of adult male population."[20]

Why do longstanding refugee camps and settlements accommodate a preponderance of people with 'special needs'? On one hand, this situation should not come as a surprise: because all populations in developing countries are comprised primarily (i.e. numerically) of women, children, adolescents, the elderly and disabled.

At the same time, however, there are reasons to believe that in protracted refugee situations, refugees with special needs are generally 'over-represented':

- because able-bodied men are most likely to leave a camp and to look for work elsewhere in order to support themselves and their family;

- because the strongest members of a refugee population are usually the first to repatriate, leaving the weaker members behind;

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[16] Van Bruaene (2001) p. 7.

[17] Adam (2002) pp. 5-6. While Yemen is not in Africa, it has been included in this review because it accommodates an African (Somali) refugee population.

[18] Jones (2002) p. 18.

[19] Economic Research Bureau (2001) p. 5.

[20] Van Bruaene (2001) p. 7.

- because refugees who are able to survive without assistance may not choose to live in a camp but will prefer to be 'spontaneously settled' in their country of asylum;

- because some refugee households and communities choose to disperse in different locations (camps, villages and cities) in order to minimize risk and maximize opportunities; and,

- because the birth rate of populations caught up in humanitarian emergencies (and consequently the number of children) is often substantially higher than that of the local population[21]

An important but neglected issue associated with this demographic analysis concerns the situation of refugee children and adolescents. While it has again not been possible to establish any precise statistics, it is clear that a very substantial proportion of Africa's long-term refugees have been born and brought up in exile, and have never even seen the 'homeland' to which they are eventually expected to return.

Finally, it should be noted that Africa's long-term refugee camps and settlement area are almost invariably also areas of substantial demographic growth. This is partly because refugee numbers often increase, either as a result of new influxes, or as a result of natural growth. But it is also because many host-country nationals are attracted to the economic and employment opportunities to be found in refugee-populated areas.

Landau, for example, states that "Kasulu, an area that was once designated as a labour reserve, has now become a major destination for Tanzanians from all over the country seeking waged employment with the international and non-governmental organizations… New houses and newly improved houses are conspicuous additions to the villages' architectural landscape."[22]

According to Jamal, Kakuma town (in contrast to the camp) increased in size from 5,000 in 1990 to 40,000 in 2000.[23] This rapid rate of growth occurred because Kenyans from other parts of the division, district and country were attracted by the services (health and education), the job opportunities (with international and national NGOs) and trading opportunities (firewood, charcoal, building materials and consumer goods) which became available with the establishment of the refugee camp.

The consistent tendency for Africa's refugee-populated areas to attract citizens of the host country casts some doubt upon persistent governmental claims that refugees have an invariably and exclusively negative impact on local economies.

Indeed, the case studies reviewed in the preparation of this paper suggest that the situation is much more complex: refugees can certainly have a disruptive effect on host communities, especially in the early days of an influx. In the longer-term, however, the presence of refugees and humanitarian agencies would appear to have a catalytic impact on local trade, business, transport and agricultural production.[24] If that were not the case, why would so many host country nationals migrate to the areas where refugees have settled?

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[21] The population growth rate amongst Burundians in Tanzania's older refugee settlements is around 5.0 per cent per annum, which is double the corresponding rate for Tanzanians. Economic Research Bureau (2001), p. 5.

[22] Landau (2001) p. 18.

[23] Jamal (2000) p. 28.

[24] Whitaker (1999), Landau (2002) and IRIN (2002), for example, all provide details of the positive impact of the Burundian refugee presence in western Tanzania.

Limited international attention

In recent years, UNHCR, donor states and other international actors have tended to focus their attention and resources on high-profile crises in which people are either fleeing in large numbers to countries of asylum or repatriating in large numbers to their country of origin. Protracted situations, which drag on for years and where there is no immediate prospect of a durable solution for the refugees concerned, have consequently been neglected. As a result, and as the following examples indicate, assistance programmes have been deprived of funds.

Reporting from Guinea, Kaiser writes that "moving around the camps, one routinely hears complaints that the quality and quantity of food assistance has declined. When the 'old' refugees first arrived, they received up to 12 items in the food basket. Today, they receive only three. In addition," she continues, "there are widespread complaints that the food ration is insufficient in terms of quantity and does not last the 45 days it is provided for. Decisions about when to cut food rations seem to have been triggered by WFP announcements that not enough food is available for the whole population, rather than on the basis of any actual reduction in need."[25]

Describing the situation in Ngara, Tanzania, Kigaru tells a similar story. "Basic assistance in food, non-food items and services such as education, health, water and sanitation are provided in the camps. Budgetary constraints, however, have curtailed the provision of adequate assistance in most of the areas." "For example," Kigaru adds, "the last half of 2000 registered drastic food cuts of up to 40 per cent. Self -reliance and income generating activities are next to nil.[26]

Addressing the situation in Kenya, a senior staff member of the International Rescue Committee (IRC) observes that "one of the most striking features of Kakuma refugee camp is the extent to which after more than 10 years of existence, it remains almost entirely dependent on international assistance for all aspects of its operations." "Donor fatigue", he explains, "as manifested by stagnant and reduced funding levels, despite increases in population and continued failures to meet minimum international humanitarian standards of service provision, is part of the operating environment for agencies such as IRC, working in a protracted refugee setting."[27]

A final example of this phenomenon can be found in the Tindouf region of Algeria:

> The inordinately low visibility and high donor weariness has produced a major funding shortfall, not only for self-reliance and development projects, but even for essential relief items (food, shelter) which reasonably should have been secured after 25 years of continuous crisis… The main priority of the refugees is still centred on emergency food supplies. The first UN common objective of ensuring food security and, subsequently, sound nutritional status is far from being achieved. Essential self-reliance projects and life sustaining activities… are heavily threatened by UNHCR budget constraints, and by the simple lack of basic food… The bare minimum of essential structures for the refugee population were built with light materials between 1978 and 1988. In most cases, this infrastructure has seen neither rehabilitation

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[25] Kaiser (2001) p. 21.

[26] Kigaru (2002) p. 7.

[27] Phillips (2002) p. 4.

nor serious maintenance since its construction.[28]

Restricted refugee rights

A final characteristic that is common to many protracted refugee situations in Africa is the inability of exiled populations to avail themselves of basic human rights - including those rights to which refugees are entitled under the provisions of the 1951 Refugee Convention and other international instruments.[29]

In the words of Jamal, Africa's long-term refugees have been provided with a very conditional form of asylum. They are generally (but not always) spared the threat of *refoulement* (involuntary return to a country where their life and liberty would be at risk). But the right to life has been bought at the cost of almost every other right.

> At Kakuma camp today, some 65,000 individuals enjoy safety from violence and persecution in their respective countries of origin. On Kenyan soil, they benefit from being allowed to remain there, and to not be forcibly sent back to their home countries... The importance of this state of affairs should not be understated. Sudanese, Somalis, Ethiopians and others in Kakuma have all benefited from this particular element of international law, that allows them to cross a border and thereby enjoy protection. Inside Kenya, however, the 65,000 Kakuma refugees (and a further 126,000 in Dadaab), enjoy neither basic freedoms available to nationals nor the somewhat restricted but still generous rights enshrined in the 1951 Convention. Their right to asylum in the country is, implicitly but emphatically, premised upon their complying with certain restrictive conditions.[30]

These 'restrictive conditions', which are common to many of the protracted situations in Africa, include the following:

- limited physical security; refugees are at risk of attack and abuse by soldiers, militia forces, rebel groups and bandits, based both in the country of asylum and in the refugees' country of origin;

- limited freedom of movement: refugees are confined to camps or designated areas and can only leave them with special permission; they may be subject to fines and penal sentences if they fail to comply with these regulations;

- limited civil and political rights: refugees may be barred from engaging in any kind of political activity, from holding mass meetings, from establishing their own associations and organizations;

- limited legal rights: refugees in many of Africa's protracted refugee situations do not have a clearly defined legal status, do not have residence rights, and have no prospect of seeking naturalization in their country of asylum. Their children may be effectively stateless.

- limited freedom of choice: as indicated earlier, refugees in protracted refugee situations

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[28] Van Bruaene (2001) pp. 7-8.

[29] See Kibreab (2001) for a more detailed examination of refugee rights in Africa.

[30] Jamal (2000) p. 7.

may fall under the control of authoritarian political and military leaders within their community, a situation which further limits their ability to exercise basic human rights, including the right to return voluntarily to their country of origin.

A final right denied to many of Africa's long-term refugees is the ability to engage in agricultural, wage-earning and income-generating opportunities. In some countries of asylum, refugees are confronted with legal constraints on their economic activities: they do not have access to land, they are not allowed to enter the labour market, they cannot take out commercial loans, and restrictions on their freedom of movement make it difficult for them to engage in trade.

Even in situations where host governments have pursued more liberal policies, and have made agricultural land available to refugees, it is becoming increasingly difficult for exiled populations to exercise their rights in an effective manner.

At the Oruchinga camp for Rwandan refugees in Uganda, for example, one finds that "the land size allocated is inadequate, the soil is not very fertile and there is a lack of fertilisers. This results in low yields, which means that there is not enough produce left over to sell."[31]

In the Kyangwali settlement, which has been described as "one of the few settlements in Uganda that can reasonably claim a high level of self sufficiency," the primarily Congolese refugee population is nevertheless confronted with a range of economic constraints, including geographical isolation, the limited size of the local market, high transportation costs, a lack of information about market conditions, poor terms of trade and the imposition of taxes on economic activities inside the settlement. [32]

In Guinea, "there is some evidence that refugees are finding it more difficult to gain access to land than they were even two or three years ago… Refugees say that they were once able to negotiate informal leases with land owners (albeit at a price), but that in some places this is now more difficult as Guineas are less willing to allow them to use it. They admit that this is because the land is becoming exhausted, systems of crop rotation and fallow land having been largely abandoned during the stay of the refugees.[33]

A similar pattern can be observed in Sudan, where large-scale agricultural settlements for refugees have been in existence for several decades.

> In Sudan the government had allocated between five and 10 acres of land for refugee use in settlements. However, except in the six settlements in the Qala en Nahal area, the rest of the land allocated to refugees is located in low rainfall areas. As a result, the refugees in these settlements commonly experience crop failure. In fact, most of them do not even bother to cultivate the land because the return they expect to get is often below the cost of production. Even the refugees around Qala en Nahal have been facing problems of considerable yield decline because of the depletion of soil nutrients and heavy weed infestation caused by over-cultivation. The refugees are legally prohibited from bringing new cultivable land outside the designated areas into the production process… No additional allocations were made by the government during the last three decades and a half, and the consequence has been over-fragmentation of farms to accommodate the

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[31] Jones (2002) p. 28.
[32] Werker (2002) pp. 9-14.
[33] Kaiser (2001) p. 13.

needs of newly established families. Most farmers have been cultivating
their plots for over 30 years without fallow periods or fertilizer.[34]

The human consequences

Perhaps the most important element of this analysis is to identify the way in which protracted
refugee situations impinge and impact upon the exiled populations themselves. Again, it is
difficult to generalize, and one should be careful to avoid an excessive degree of pessimism
by identifying only the worst-case scenarios.[35] It must also be acknowledged that refugee
populations are generally stratified, with some groups and individuals enjoying better
conditions of life than other camp and settlement residents. Even so, the situation of most
Africans living in protracted refugee situations would appear to be dismal in a number of
respects.

Material deprivation

The case studies reviewed in the preparation of this paper suggest that Africa's long-term
refugees take whatever opportunities they can to establish their own livelihoods and to
supplement the meagre levels of assistance they receive. As Turner reports from Tanzania,
"people in Lukole do not sit around with their hands in their laps… Among the most visible
signs of this are the various livelihood strategies that they apply in order to improve their
material conditions." "In the market in Lukole A alone," Turner continues, "there were 48
restaurants, 32 bars, 95 shops selling shoes, clothes, batteries, salt, rice etc., 94 *mugorigori*
outlets and 116 market stalls selling fresh fruit, vegetables and maize.[36]

Reporting from Kakuma in Kenya, Kurimoto makes a similar observation:

> What is amazing are the commercial and trade activities carried out at
> open markets with stalls and at shops. Particularly impressive are
> 'shopping centres' which stretch for more than one kilometre along two
> parallel main roads in the south of the camp. Both sides of the roads are
> full of kiosks selling a variety of commodities, butcheries, groceries, tea
> and coffee houses, bars and restaurants, hotels, satellite TV and video
> theatres, hair salons. There is even a place where international fax and
> telephone services are available.[37]

While a wide range of economic activities undoubtedly take place in and around Africa's
long-term refugee camps, the more visible of those activities - such as the markets in Lukole
and Kakuma - would appear to benefit the relatively small number of refugees who have
entrepreneurial skills and access to capital. Because of the absence of development and
investment in the areas where refugee are accommodated, because of the limited range of
rights which they can exercise, and because of the very low levels of assistance they receive,
the vast majority of refugees living in protracted situations tend to be very poor. And in some
instances they are becoming steadily poorer.

Hermann Ketel, who travelled to the Central African Republic on behalf of UNHCR, writes

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[34] Gaim Kibreab, quoted in Lawday (2001) pp. 3-4.

[35] It could be argued that this paper is inherently pessimistic, as it looks only at the situation of refugees
in camps and organized settlements. A review of the situation of long-term refugees who have settled
outside such camps and settlements would almost certainly be more positive in tone.

[36] Turner (2001) p. 161.

[37] Kurimoto (2002) p. 5.

that "at the time of the mission, the overall situation in the Mboki refugee area was depressing… The mortality rate was such that during the mission's work in the area there were daily reminders of people's distress in the shape of numerous traditional mourning ceremonies. Great and almost continuous pressure was put on the mission to do what it could to ameliorate these lamentable conditions.[38]

Jones found a similarly depressing scenario in Uganda. "All respondents highlighted the major resource that they lacked was sufficient food, and were particularly concerned that the food assistance was decreasing. Originally, refugees were given milk, sugar, salt, peas, beans ands tinned fish, but as it is assumed that the refugees can grow enough food, the food assistance has decreased."

Jones goes on to say that "respondents stated that the majority of their small amount of money was being spent on food to supplement what they grow and the rations from the Red Cross. This is at the detriment to everything else: education, shelter improvements, sanitation, health, etc."[39]

Lawday's review of the protracted refugee situation in Sudan also reaches a gloomy conclusion:

> After years of generous assistance, the refugees were totally dependent on outside assistance. Most projects failed to create self-reliance, leaving refugees in a precarious economic and social situation, with food security not assured. Land distribution and wage-earning opportunities fell behind refugee needs. A study found that refugees were living in reception centres, nine wage-based settlements and 11 land-based settlements. Only an estimated 16 per cent were able to farm and even fewer kept animals. More than half did wage earning activities, but only seasonally, and could not meet household needs. Food needs remained as before and sometimes even higher.[40]

The failure of Africa's long-term refugees to attain the most basic level of food security has been the subject of some angry commentary by the International Rescue Committee. Describing the situation in Kakuma, Kenya, the IRC reveals that in April 2001, the global malnutrition rate in the camp stood at over 17 per cent. "While alarming in and of itself," the IRC observes, "what is more alarming is that global malnutrition rates on Kakuma have not significantly deviated from this level for the last six years. These are rates that one would expect to see in severe nutritional emergencies… What is particularly notable is that this is happening not in an acute emergency setting. But in a care-and-maintenance camp that has been in existence for ten years.[41]

Psycho-social and gender issues

In recent years, a considerable amount of literature has been published on the psycho-social situation of people who are affected by armed conflicts and other disasters. While relatively

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[38] Ketel (2002) p. 2.

[39] Jones (2002) p. 28.

[40] Lawday (2001) pp. 3-4.

[41] Phillips (2002) pp. 1 and 3.

little has been written about the psycho-social dimensions of protracted refugee situations, some evidence on this issue can be found in the case studies which form the basis of this paper.

Following a visit to Kenya in 1999, the current author noted that "reports from medical and social services workers in the camps make frequent reference to the 'nervous depression and dependency' of the refugees, describing them as 'traumatized', 'aggressive', 'highly stressed', and as suffering from 'emotional and behavioural problems'."[42] A year later, Jamal came to similar conclusions. "The most apparent and prevalent mood in Kakuma camp today," he wrote, "is a sense of despair and low self-worth."[43]

In Uganda, Jones found that the refugees he interviewed (primarily Rwandans) were characterized by "despondency, lethargy, boredom and feelings of inadequacy." When they were asked to rank the main limitations on their livelihoods, "certain correspondents felt their own situation so helpless that active participation in such a discussion was useless."[44]

In his study of Burundian refugees in Tanzania, Turner nicely captures the social and cultural processes which generate such negative attitudes. Lukole camp, he suggests, is "an exceptional space":

> Around 100,000 people with very different backgrounds have been crammed into this small area in the Tanzanian bush, where they are taken care of by high-profile international organizations and subjected to a number of extraordinary rules and regulations. They are not allowed to involve themselves in politics, leave the camp, work or (at least formally) barter their food rations. They are given food and water and health care free of charge, irrespective of whether they used to be a minister, a peasant or a street kid in Burundi. In a sense, the camp is like a super-compressed urbanization process.[45]

Turner goes on to suggest that in this process of social change, the refugees in Lukole have experienced a very specific and concrete sense of loss. "They have been brutally forced to leave the places that they knew so well and put in a setting that is miles apart from the hilltop where they used to live… They no longer grow the bananas and other crops they used to. They live next door to people whose background they do not know. And they are subjected to strange rules and regulations that are imposed upon them by new and unknown authorities and agencies."[46]
These conditions have had important consequences for relationships within the household and within the population ('community' may not be an appropriate word in this context) as a whole. "What is perceived to be lost," Turner suggests, "is the old social order, and this can be seen in women's lack of respect for men, in children's lack of respect for adults, and in small people's lack of respect for 'big men'. [47]

As Turner has pointed out in another paper, protracted refugee situations have some specific implications for male refugees. Employing the notion of "lost masculinity," Turner argues that the conditions of life encountered in Lukole represent "a challenge to the unquestioned

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[42] Crisp (2000) p. 624.

[43] Jamal (2000) p. 17.

[44] Jones (2002) p. 36.

[45] Perouse de Montclos and Kagwanja (2000) make a similar observation in relation to the urban nature of Kenya's long-term refugee camps.

[46] Turner (2001) p. 67.

[47] Turner (2001) p. 108.

authority of the patriarchy." He goes on to suggest that "this is most obviously seen by the fact that refugees in Lukole depict UNHCR as the father or husband; it takes the place of the patriarch and it deprives people of any control over their lives."[48]

The findings presented in Turner's paper (which bears the self-explanatory title 'Angry young men in camps') find a resonance elsewhere. Describing the situation of Angolan refugees in Zambia, Eruesto points out that adult men "are no longer perceived as the bearers of wisdom and advice." In fact, they are perceived to be "old-fashioned and outdated." "Skills that would have been taught to boys are no longer relevant, negating the role of older male members of the family… As people are appointed to lead refugee communities and NGOs focus largely on empowering women, the traditional male role soon disappears and men can start to feel worthless and insignificant."[49]

Unsurprisingly, such circumstances have a particular impact on adolescent refugee males - teenagers and young men who are unable to assume traditional male roles after puberty, and who have little prospect of establishing a sustainable livelihood. A common finding of recent studies is that males in this age-group are particularly prone to engage in negative coping mechanisms, including various forms of delinquent or anti-social behaviour. Thus in Ghana's Budumbura camp, for example, Dick reports:

> A growing problem at the camp are restless youths that have no interest in attending school. One area of the camp, known as The Gap, is particularly notorious… Imitating American-style 'gangstas in the hood', these youths spend their days without much to do and get themselves in trouble from time to time. Some camps residents are concerned that they spoil the reputation of Liberians in Ghana, potentially giving the Ghanaian authorities a good excuse for closing down the camp.[50]

Social tension and violence

Unsurprisingly, given the high levels of material and psycho-social deprivation described above, protracted refugee situations in Africa are generally characterized by high levels of social tension and physical violence.

As the current author has explained elsewhere, the problem of violence is epitomized by the Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps in Kenya, where "incidents involving death and serious injury take place on a daily basis," and where "outbreaks of violence and unrest occur without warning."[51]

According to the author's study of the two camps, such violence assumes a variety of different forms: domestic and community violence; sexual abuse and violence; armed robbery; violence within national refugee groups; violence between national refugee groups; and violence between refugees and local populations. A recent 'human security analysis' amongst refugees in the Arua District of Uganda yielded similar results.[52]

The roots of such violence, the author's Kenya study suggests, are inherent to the circumstances in which the exiled population is trapped:

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[48] Turner (1999) p. 6.

[49] Eruesto (2002) p. 14.

[50] Dick (2002a) p. 21.

[51] Crisp (2000) p. 601.

[52] See Hovil and Werker (2001).

The refugees are obliged to remain in areas which have traditionally been insecure, where the rule of law is weak and where the perpetrators of violence can act with a high degree of impunity. The refugees themselves are obliged to live in very trying circumstances, a factor which increases their propensity and vulnerability to violence. Having fled from countries which have experienced protracted and very brutal forms of armed conflict, they find themselves without freedom of movement, with few economic or educational opportunities, and with almost no immediate prospect of finding a solution to their plight… However well intentioned, and irrespective of their technical proficiency, the security measures introduced by UNHCR and its partners cannot be expected to resolve the problem of violence in Kakuma and Dadaab.[53]

While Africa has been rightly renowned for its tradition of hospitality to exiled populations, there is considerable evidence to suggest that this welcome has worn very thin in many protracted refugee situations. Indeed, tension and conflict between refugees and local residents would appear to be on the rise.[54] And as Ketel explains in a report on Sudanese refugees in the Central African Republic, those 'local residents' are not necessarily indigenous to the area where the refugees have settled.

In the early days, the refugees who were settled in Mboki were coming to a generally uninhabited area, to which Central Africans from other parts of the country were later attracted because of international development was taking place. Nevertheless, local Central Africans today clearly consider themselves as being the 'permanent' population, whereas they see the refugees a temporary residents. Within this context, friction has arisen from two main issues. One is the degree to which the Central Africans consider that they benefit from projects and services provided to the refugees. Their feeling is that they are being short-changed. The second bone of contention concerns the pressure on natural resources in the area. The host community feels that there is a marked deterioration of a number of resources, most notably land, wood, game and fish. The generally poor social atmosphere in the Mboki area during the time of the mission was further adversely influenced by UNHCR's policy of disengagement from the provision of health care, education, water supplies and social services.[55]

Guinea provides another example of a country where relations between refugees and their local hosts have suffered a serious deterioration. When Tania Kaiser visited Guinea in 2000, she wrote that "relations between refugee communities and the local population are said to be good." Nevertheless, the seeds of conflict had already been sown:

There is a ... sense of an increasingly serious situation on the part of the local populations, who in some cases seem to be panicking now about the effects of the refugees on their farming land and on the forest around it. They are relatively resigned to refugees' overuse of the environment, but feel that there are limits… Guinean villagers without exception talked about the desirability of the war in Sierra Leone coming to an end and the

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[53] Crisp (2000) pp. 631-2.

[54] This statement conceals the complex nature of the relationship that often exists between refugees and local populations. See Ohta (2001).

[55] Ketel (2002), p. 4.

repatriation of their refugee guests.[56]

Almost immediately after those words were written, the Guinean President made an inflammatory radio broadcast alleging that the Liberian and Sierra Leonean refuges in the country were a source of insecurity and that they should be sent home. According to Studdart, "literally overnight, the situation in Guinea drastically changed," with refugees becoming "the victims of numerous human rights abuses, including arbitrary arrest, harassment, sexual abuse, extortion, eviction and disappearances. [57]

While this campaign of terror was led by the military, militia groups and civilian vigilantes, it also enjoyed much broader popular support. In the words of Human Rights Watch, there was "rising hostility among Guineans of all walks of life toward the estimated 300,000 Sierra Leonean and 125,000 Liberian refugees, reversing Guinea's long-standing history of welcoming these refugees over the past decade."[58]

Survival strategies

Africa's long-term refugees resort to a variety of survival strategies in order to make ends meet and to come to terms with the difficult conditions in which they find themselves.[59] And as the following paragraphs indicate, such strategies often have adverse consequences, both for the refugees and for their local hosts.

Sexual exploitation

Sadly, one of the most frequent means for refugees to survive in a protracted situation is by means of exploitative sexual relationships, either by commercial prostitution or through forms of *concubinage* in which a woman or girl receives goods and gifts from a regular sexual partner. While there is relatively little evidence on this matter, there are some indications that young refugee males might also be the victims of sexually exploitative relationships.

As Dick points out in her case study of Ghana, sexual exploitation is often self-reinforcing. "Refugee women are particularly susceptible to dependency on relationships with men as a way to sustain themselves financially and to access luxury items that they value. As a result, teen pregnancy is common at the camp, giving many young women the added burden of providing for a child, thus perpetuating the need to be dependent on a boyfriend."[60]

Exploitative employment

Another way for Africa's long-term refugees to make ends meet is to work for minimal rewards, whether for members of the local population, for more prosperous refugees, or for aid organizations. In some situations, refugee girls may be sent to work as domestic labourers in other households, a situation that evidently increases the risk that they will be subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse.

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56 Kaiser (2001) pp. 13-14.

57 Studdart (2002) pp. 7 and 10.

58 Human Rights Watch (footnote to be completed)

59 Horst (2001) and (2001a) and Dick (2002) provide particularly illuminating examinations of refugee survival strategies.

60 Dick (2002) p. 21.

While little data is available on the income earned by refugees, it is evident that a large-scale refugee presence in a situation where there are few income-earning opportunities has the effect of driving down wages. According to one Guinean businessman, refugees were employed at 1,500 francs a day in 1990. It has now dropped to 500 francs a day, while the purchasing power of the currency has declined significantly during the same period.[61]

In northern Uganda, Sudanese refugees have little option but to engage in an exploitative form of piecework known as *lejaleja*. "Payment is usually very small and can be made in kind rather than cash." "For individuals who have no other source of income," says Kaiser, "it represents the only way of contributing to the household."[62]

Illegal and unsustainable farming

Finding themselves in a situation where have no or very limited access to land, some long-term refugees try to engage in agriculture by encroaching on land which they have no right to use. In Tanzania, for example, researchers found that "with long-time usage, most of the farm plots are now recording low and declining productivity… This factor, together with the increased number of people has led to increased demand for land. Incidents of refugees expanding beyond the boundaries of settlements are becoming a serious problem."[63]

More generally, there is evidence to suggest that refugees may resort to unsustainable or 'anarchic' farming practices in an attempt to make ends meet. According to environmental expert Hermann Ketel, such practices include non-selective tree-felling and indiscriminate land clearance, as well as shifting cultivation without a sustainable rotation strategy.[64]

Another environmental specialist, Matthew Owen, concurs with Ketel. "A basic contradiction arises," he says, "in promoting sound environmental management in land-based refugee settlements, when refugees lack formal ownership rights but are expected to live off the land in a sustainable manner. They will tend to take a short -term perspective to meeting their food security needs, and not consider the longer-term implications of their practices for the well-being of the land."[65]

Manipulating and maximizing assistance

Humanitarian personnel in Africa's longstanding refugee camps often complain that they spend much of their time trying to prevent beneficiaries from 'cheating the system'. That such manipulation takes place is beyond dispute. And in some instances, those engaged in such manipulation may also be amongst the most powerful and prosperous members of the refugee population.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that other refugees - those without a privileged social or political status - may also take steps to maximize the assistance they receive, so as to support themselves and their households. These may include:

- recycling (leaving a camp, returning and re-registering for assistance);
- splitting households into smaller groups, so as to qualify for additional rations;

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[61] Kaiser (2001) p. 14.

[62] Kaiser (2000) p. 19.

[63] Economic Research Bureau (2001) p. 5.

[64] Ketel (2002) pp. 5 and 7.

[65] Owen (2001) p.15.

- ration card fraud and sales;
- obstructing re-registration exercises that might lead to a reduction of relief entitlements; and,
- keeping children deliberately undernourished so they qualify for special feeding programmes.

Negative coping mechanisms

In addition the survival strategies identified above, refugees in protracted refugee situations engage in a variety of more directly negative coping mechanisms in order to survive or to come to terms with their difficult conditions of life.

Such mechanisms include the theft of crops, cattle and other assets (whether from other refugees, the local population or from humanitarian agencies); the sale of vital assets (including grain stocks or domestic items such as clothes and blankets); the collection (which is often illegal) of natural resources that can sold or bartered; the use income-generating loans for the purpose of everyday consumption; engaging in substance abuse; repatriating prematurely to countries where conditions remain unsafe; or simply going hungry, and foraging for whatever foodstuffs can be collected in the wild - including some which may prove to be poisonous.

As the IRC has explained, such strategies often reinforce the social tensions that are to be found in and around long-term refugee settlement areas. "The evidence shows that under worsening conditions, there are ... coping strategies that refugees can, and will resort to when all others are exhausted. These include theft, banditry, and violent conflict with neighbours in order to access food... They will steal from neighbours, they will pursue the possession of additional ration cards more aggressively; they will engage in fraud and misrepresentation.[66]

Needless to say, while such strategies may represent a short-term solution to the inadequacies of international assistance, they ultimately expose those people to even greater risk and hardship. And in this respect, women are especially vulnerable. As Davey explains in the case of Kenya:

> The poor food basket provision (by WFP) is undoubtedly having an effect on the necessity of refugees to use other resources to acquire food and some degree of a balanced diet. While many rely on remittances of money from friends and relatives elsewhere, others have little choice but to use the local environment to generate income - collecting and selling firewood, building poles and grass. Mostly it is women who are collecting these materials. Those engaged in this activity are vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence. The diminished food basket is, at present, one of the key factors putting these women at risk.[67]

Remittances

There is evidence to suggest that refugees in protracted situations are becoming increasingly reliant upon remittances sent to them by family members who have succeeded in moving to another part of the world. This is especially the case with regard to refugees who form part of large diaspora communities.

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[66] Phillips (2002) p .5.

[67] Davey (2002) para 56.

Liberian refugees in Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana, for example, receive remittances through Western Union, which has established offices in both countries for this specific purpose. The Somalis, on the other hand, transfer money to refugees in Kenya and other countries through the indigenous *hawilaad* network, which has been described as "an informal system of value transfer that operates in almost every part of the world."[68] According to Horst and Van Hear:

> The *hawilaad* system has been of great importance in the lives of many Somalis, including refugees. For those in the three camps around Dadaab in north-eastern Kenya, survival is a daily struggle in an arid environment. The international community hands out rations of maize and at time what flour or beans every 15 days, but these last only about ten days. Firewood is distributed a couple of times a year as well, but amounts are far from sufficient. Besides, people have other needs that are not catered for through handouts. It is very difficult to find additional sources of income in the area.

They continue:

> Receiving a monthly allowance of $100 a month from a relative in Toronto or Nairobi therefore makes an immense difference to refugees in Dadaab… Beyond helping Somalis to survive, the remittances transferred give people a choice. The money can be invested in business, or used to assist others of for children's education. The recipient can use it to move away: away from insecure areas, towards economic opportunities, towards a better life or family members elsewhere in the world.[69]

From the limited evidence available, one can conclude that remittances benefit refugee populations as a whole, and not simply those individuals and households who receive the cash.

According to Dick, for example, "with limited and dwindling assistance from UNHCR, remittances have proved crucial in enabling refugees to survive in Ghana. Their effect is felt beyond their immediate recipients. Many refugees have invested remittance money in small businesses, thus fuelling the camp economy. And those without access to remittances depend on the generosity of friends and family who share their resources."[70] Similarly, Horst and Van Hear suggest that even though the proportion of refugees who receive remittances may be only 10 to 15 per cent, of the populations, others benefit indirectly.

At the same time, the receipt of remittances might also have the effect of increasing the socio-economic inequalities to be found in a refugee population, thereby increasing the potential for tension and social conflict between the 'haves' and 'have-nots'. Additional research is required on this issue.

Mobility and migration

As Horst has pointed out, mobility is a well-established means of coping with insecurity in Africa, especially amongst pastoralist populations whose ability to survive in harsh

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[68] Horst and Van Hear (2002) p. 32.

[69] Ibid p. 33.

[70] Dick (2002a) p. 2.

circumstances is predicated on the assumption of regular movement.[71]

Trapped as they are in a state of limbo, it is hardly surprising that many of Africa's long-term refugees try to find their own solution by this means of mobility and migration.

This may involve leaving a camp and moving to a town to look for work (an act which is often illegal, which separates family members, and which often exposes refugee to new forms of exploitation and insecurity). It might also entail moving to a refugee camp in another country; Burundian refugees are known to move from Tanzania to Uganda, for example, because the conditions of life and the policies of the host government are thought to be more favourable in the latter than the former. In addition, it can mean that refugees try to move on from their country of first asylum to other parts of the world - a decision which is increasingly likely to put them into the hands of unscrupulous human smugglers and traffickers.

Finally, there is considerable evidence to suggest that the poor quality of life in many of Africa's protracted refugee situations has led a growing number of exiles to regard resettlement as the only way out of their difficult situation. In fact, as Horst explains, Somali refugees in Kenya have a word (*buufis*) to describe this syndrome, which essentially means 'extreme hope for resettlement'.[72] With the development of this syndrome, resettlement has become an increasingly competitive process, a source of tension within and between refugee communities, and (as UNHCR recently found to its cost the Kenyan capital of Nairobi) a serious source of corruption.

Responding to protracted refugee situations

It would be highly misleading to suggest that there are any quick or easy solutions to the problem of protracted refugee situations in Africa. Indeed, some of the proposals currently made in relation to such situations - including the notion of linking refugee aid to development programmes that also involve and bring benefits to the host population - have been tried in the past with relatively little success.[73]

Other suggestions - such as the 'rights-based' proposal that long-term refugees should not be confined to camps but should be allowed to settle wherever they wish in their country of asylum - would not appear to be politically feasible in many refugee-hosting countries. Indeed, it is clear that many refugees in Africa would be at risk of early refoulement if UNHCR were to advocate such an approach.
While it is difficult to be at all optimistic, a number of proposals might warrant additional consideration if the problem of Africa's protracted refugee situations is to be effectively addressed.

Ending armed conflicts

First, the international community as a whole must give greater attention to resolving the conflicts that are at the root of most protracted refugee situations. In too many situations, longstanding conflicts have been allowed to fester for years, to gain their own momentum and to pass unresolved from one generation to another.

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[71] Horst (2002)

[72] Horst (2002a).

[73] A detailed analysis of these initiatives is provided in Crisp (2001). The latest variant on this approach, UNHCR's new 'Development through Local Integration' (DLI) strategy, remains to be operationally tested. For an example of this approach, the 'Zambia Initiative', see Marie and Shimo (2002).

What does this mean in practice? It is difficult to think of any entirely new initiatives, but these measures should evidently include more intensive mediation, peacekeeping, peacemaking and peacebuilding efforts, undertaken by the United Nations, by regional and sub-regional organizations such as the African Union, and by states which have an economic and political influence in the countries where conflicts are taking place.

In some situations, more robust forms of intervention may also be required, involving regional and/or international forces. But the limitations of this approach should be recognized. For experience in Africa and other parts of the world has shown that intervention forces can themselves become a source of instability and human rights violations.

Maintaining the voluntary nature of repatriation

Second, the international community must maintain the principle of voluntary repatriation. With so many refugees trapped in protracted situations, and with refugee-hosting countries expressing growing reluctance to accommodate exiled populations on their territory, there has been a tendency in some quarters to challenge the principle of voluntary repatriation. As long as conditions in the country of origin appear safe, it has been argued, why not simply tell the refugees to go home - and oblige them to do so if they refuse?

A number of different arguments can be made against this position:

- it is contrary to international and African refugee law;

- it ignores the fact that there is a well-established mechanism - the cessation clause of the 1951 Convention - that can be invoked to terminate refugee status when the reasons for flight have been resolved;

- it will inevitably jeopardize the safety and security of some refugees, who may have good reason not to return to their homeland, even if conditions there appear to have improved; and,

- it is likely to lead to further instability in the country of origin; how better to destabilize a country which is recovering from a period of violence and destruction than to send large numbers of people back there against their will, and to areas which are unable to absorb them?

Exploring alternative solutions

Third, the international community should explore alternative solutions to protracted refugee problems. In this respect, some realism is required. Very few of Africa's long-term refugees are likely to be accepted for resettlement, which is in any case a relatively complex and costly way of finding solutions to refugee problems. Similarly, local integration is not a solution that is available or feasible for a large proportion of Africa's refugees - either because their country of asylum does not want them to settle permanently, or because the refugees themselves would prefer to return to their homeland.

In certain protracted refugee situations, however, the potential for local integration may exist:

- when refugees have moved into an area which is populated by people of the same ethnic origin;

- when refugees have moved into an area where there is a surplus of agricultural land or where other economic opportunities exist;

- when refugees have been able to establish sustainable livelihoods but where their legal status and residence rights remain unresolved; and,

- when a 'residual caseload' of refugees has established strong social and economic links to their country of asylum.

In many parts of Africa, large number of refugees have settled 'spontaneously' amongst their local hosts, and have managed to support themselves without international assistance. This suggests that the potential for local integration is somewhat greater than is often assumed.

Promoting self-reliance pending return

Fourth, the international community should promote the principle of refugee self-reliance, pending the time when voluntary repatriation (or, in a much smaller number of cases, local integration or resettlement) becomes possible.

The notion of 'self-reliance pending return' has advantages for all of the stakeholders in a protracted refugee situation. It would improve the quality of life for refugees, giving them a new degree of dignity and security. It would enable refugees to make a contribution to the economy of the host country and thereby make their presence a boon, rather than a burden, to the local population. And it would enable UNHCR, its donors and implementing partners to withdraw from costly and complicated 'care-and-maintenance' programmes which only enable refugees to survive at the level of basic subsistence.

Such a policy will not necessarily be welcomed by many refugee-hosting countries, which claim that refugees who develop a degree of self-sufficiency and who become 'comfortable' in their country of asylum will never want to go home. But this need not be the case. In fact, experience shows that refugees who have led a productive life in exile, received an education, developed practical skills, and accumulates some resources may actually be better prepared and equipped to go home and contribute to the reconstruction of their country than those who have languished in camps for years, surviving on minimal levels of humanitarian assistance.[74]

But (and it is a very big but) what can be done to realize the principle of self-reliance pending return? There would appear to be several requirements.

1. Rights and the rule of law

As argued earlier in this paper, many refugees in protracted situations are unable to escape from poverty because they live in conditions of insecurity and because they are unable to exercise the basic rights which would enable them to be productive. A first step in the direction of 'self-reliance pending return' must therefore be the restoration of the rights and security to which refugees are entitled under international law. In this respect, the 'Agenda for Protection', a global programme of action that was recently endorsed by UNHCR's Executive Committee, provides an important starting point.

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[74] This assertion is substantiated by the case of Ukwimi camp for Mozambican refugees in Zambia. While the refugees were able to attain a high degree of self-reliance in the camp, they returned to their own country almost immediately, once it became safe to do so. See Lin (2001).

2. Education

It is taken for granted in most countries that a society's level of economic growth and prosperity is intimately linked to the quality of education and training that its citizens receive. Refugees also appear to recognize this fact, and generally place an enormous importance on the education of their children.

Unfortunately, the international community as a whole does not seem to have adopted the same position. Indeed, with assistance budgets under pressure, the quantity and quality of education available to refugees in many parts of Africa appears to have declined. This trend must be reversed.

As Sperl has argued, "there is a profound difference between camps conceived merely as holding centres for survival and camps which provide their residents with the means to acquire knowledge and skills which will help them to rebuild their lives." "Residence in refugee camps," he continues, "undesirable as such, should be treated as an opportunity to provide the residents with new or upgraded skills so as to help them reconstruct their livelihood when the opportunity arises. To this effect, education, training and literacy programmes aimed at all sectors of the population should not, as so often, be seen as ancillary but as vital, primary and no less important than the provision of food and health care."[75]

3. International resources

Promoting self-reliance amongst Africa's long-term refugee populations will not be a cost-free undertaking, especially in the short-term. As earlier sections of this paper have explained, many refugees remain poor because the land they have been given is unproductive; because they have access to inadequate medical services and water supplies, and are consequently in bad health; and because the infrastructure in their camps and settlement areas is in an advanced state of disrepair. Without addressing these issues - and without mobilizing the resources required for these issues to be addressed - the goal of 'self-reliance pending return' is unlikely to be attained.

4. Expertise

Given the limited resources at their disposal and the difficult environments in which they have to work, humanitarian agencies are struggling to ensure that even the most minimum of standards are maintained in Africa's protracted refugee situations. Those agencies are even less well equipped for the task of promoting self-reliance in refugee-populated areas, pending the time when repatriation becomes possible.

UNHCR, for example, has relatively little expertise (and probably has less expertise than it had a decade or two ago) in areas such as agricultural extension, micro-finance and income-generating activities. UNHCR and its humanitarian partners are also unable to address the macro-economic factors that place such a severe constraint on the promotion of self-reliance in refugee-populated areas. In such circumstances, the involvement of development actors - national, regional and international - is a necessary condition for the pursuit of the approach

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[75] Sperl (2000) p. 11.

proposed in this paper.

5. A longer-term and more ambitious approach

Last but by no means least, humanitarian actors must learn from experience. And experience suggests that in Africa, refugee situations are far more likely to persist for long periods of time than they are to be resolved in a matter of weeks or months. Nevertheless, UNHCR and its donors have continued to administer what are essentially emergency relief operations for periods of five, ten or fifteen years. As Dick has argued, a longer-term perspective is required:

> It would be useful to assume that refugees will stay for a few years and to make plans to utilise their presence. If this assumption proves false and refugees return home in a matter of days or months, nothing has been lost. But if refugees do stay on, community development efforts would be a better alternative to repeating the same scenario of funding years of relief that only perpetuate refugee dependency.[76]

Arafat Jamal, a member of UNHCR's Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit, makes a similar point. In protracted refugee situations, he argues, UNHCR operates long-term care-and-maintenance programmes which are essentially static, which take no account of the evolving needs of a refugee population (or their local hosts), and which are geared towards the maintenance of minimum, emergency-oriented standards in the face of declining resources. [77]

Jamal's prescription for this situation provides a useful conclusion to this paper.

First, he argues that UNHCR and other actors, including host governments, local populations, development agencies and the private sector, should collectively develop a far more ambitious vision with regard to the management of protracted refugee situations.

Second, Jamal proposes the adoption of a "segmented and targeted approach," recognizing that long-term refugee populations are not an undifferentiated mass, but that they comprise different groups of people with various needs, abilities and aspirations. In this respect, much greater efforts could be made to understand and development the skills profiles of Africa's refugee populations, rather than working on the outdated assumption that the continent's displaced people are invariably farmers. Indeed, with so many children growing up in camps where they have no access to land, such assumptions must be radically revised.

Finally, Jamal (like Dick) argues that efforts to enhance individual skills and competencies in protracted refugee situations should be matched by efforts to develop community structures and systems of self-governance. Recognizing the city-like nature of many large refugee camps, he also suggests that useful lessons might be learned from participatory municipal management and urban planning   techniques.

"A durable solution may be out of reach," Jamal concludes, "but human capacities can be worked upon at any point…   A programme for a protracted refugee situation could concentrate on developing refugee communities and the individuals that comprise them, both for their current well-being, and in preparation for a future durable solution."[78]

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[76] Dick (2002b) p. 28.
[77] Jamal (2000) p. 32.
[78] Jamal (2000) p. 35.

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