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# Changing the Equation: Refugees as Valuable Resources Rather than Helpless Victims

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Refugees are expensive. Or rather, hosting countries and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) typically conceptualize refugees to be expensive. Depending on UNHCR to assist them, host governments ordinarily require refugees to live in camps or organized settlements where it is assumed that they can be more easily managed and UNHCR can more easily provide material assistance. The primary means of assistance is through short-term emergency relief interventions that usually evolve into care and maintenance programs, which include the distribution of food rations and sundry items depending on the generosity of donors, as well as education, health care, and sanitation programs. Decisions are usually made on behalf of refugees who are merely beneficiaries of aid.<sup>1</sup> When refugee situations become protracted, little is done to capitalize on the human resource potential of refugee populations, and they continue to be viewed as a burden to UNHCR and to their hosts.

UNHCR's mandate requires it to respond quickly to emergencies that unfold in unpredictable ways. However, given that many refugee situations become protracted, it would in many cases be more cost effective to plan reactive assistance programs with long-term development strategies in mind rather than indefinitely maintaining expensive relief programs originally intended for the short-term. In an ideal scenario it would seem advisable for UNHCR to plan an exit strategy for relief programs

that is agreed upon by the host government and clearly articulated to all stakeholders, including refugees. Refugees would likely require relief assistance for the first months of their exile in order to get back on their feet. But long-term assistance programs should be designed with the goal of preparing refugees to become productive residents of the host country, contributing to rather than depleting and exhausting resources and services.

Unfortunately, the more common scenario is that refugees stay for years in camps, hampered by restrictive host country policies that prevent them from pursuing agricultural, educational, and economic

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opportunities. Barred from employing standard practices of supporting themselves, refugees use whatever means are available to supplement assistance given by UNHCR, often resorting to negative coping strategies in order to survive. Such mechanisms include

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“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 be sold or bartered; the use of income-generating loans for the

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purpose of everyday consumption; engaging in substance abuse; repatriating prematurely to countries where conditions remain unsafe; or simply going hungry...”<sup>2</sup> The inadequacies of international assistance and the restrictiveness of host country policies clearly must be addressed in order to reduce the need for refugees to resort to such strategies.

Contributing to the growing body of literature that advocates for alternatives to the current system of relief to refugees contained in camps in protracted situations,<sup>3</sup> this paper considers how refugee assistance programs could utilize existing resources to assist more effectively in the development of refugees and their hosts. For the purpose of this discussion, development is defined as a continuous process whereby a community is allowed to identify its own problems and seek solutions that will improve the lives of community members according to their own values. For the development ideal to be possible in protracted refugee situations, a number of challenges would need to be addressed. First, adequate peace and security in the refugee-affected area is essential. Second, host governments need to be convinced to allow refugees the freedoms necessary to pursue development opportunities. Third, host communities need to benefit equally from development assistance so as not to exacerbate tensions between refugees and their hosts. Fourth, refugee assistance programs need to be altered significantly

and donors need to see the importance of funding these programs. And last, refugees themselves, long accustomed to viewing UNHCR as their benefactor, need to demonstrate willingness to participate in the development process and self-reliance programs. With a theoretical discussion of these challenges as a backdrop, this paper will provide an analysis of refugee situations in Ghana, Tanzania, and Zambia, highlighting the current state of affairs and considering the potential for development in each situation.

### **CHALLENGES TO DEVELOPMENT IN REFUGEE-AFFECTED AREAS**

Efforts to increase peace and security in countries of origin should be the highest priority so that refugees have the option to return home and invest in the development of their own countries. However, because protracted refugee situations persist in many parts of the world, with the majority being in Africa,<sup>4</sup> it is imperative to seek better ways of addressing the symptoms of conflict while at the same time seeking solutions to the root causes.

#### ***A Need for Adequate Peace and Security***

If host countries are concerned that violence will spill over from neighboring states they are more likely to limit refugee freedoms, and aid is likely the only viable means of sustaining refugee populations in these situations. Once peace and security concerns have been addressed, refugees typically establish themselves relatively quickly and take up the routine tasks of trading, farming, and pursuing educational and other opportunities wherever possible. In this new environment, the development process can be facilitated or frustrated depending on how host governments, aid agencies, and donors respond.

#### ***A Need for Host Government Involvement***

Perhaps the greatest challenge is to convince host governments to cooperate with development assistance programs. Barb Wigley explains, “Longer-term development strategies are often not in the interests of ... host governments who, for example, may be reluctant to be seen to encourage long term settlement, may be concerned by their relations with the refugee-producing government, or may be attempting to discourage further refugee movements.”<sup>5</sup> Given these concerns, host government policies typically

severely restrict refugees' rights to movement, land ownership, and employment as a way to control refugee populations and to maintain the charade that they are temporary residents on the land.

It seems imperative for refugee advocates, whether UNHCR, aid agencies, or academics, to provide states with convincing reasons and incentives to seek alternatives to maintaining refugees in camps in protracted situations. It is not likely that policy changes will come about quickly, but the following arguments appeal to state interest, showing benefits for hosts as well as refugees:

- State security could be safeguarded by allowing refugees to mingle freely with their hosts, to work with them, and to develop relationships of reciprocity and solidarity. Isolating and containing refugees in camps runs the risk of making camps a base for rebel activity. Typically governments argue for camps as a way to quarantine or control a potential security threat, but the camps in Rwanda that shielded the *interahamwe* provide sufficient evidence to the contrary.<sup>6</sup>
- If local integration as a permanent solution is politically unpopular, other alternatives could be explored, such as a residency status that would allow refugees greater freedoms, particularly the freedom of movement, without making them citizens.
- Population increases can benefit a host state, as has been the case in the U.S., Canada, and Australia where refugees and immigrants have contributed significantly to economic growth. Malthusian ideas that more people mean fewer resources for everyone dominate the political discourse in most African refugee hosting states. Pilot projects could be undertaken to find out empirically if hosting more people could actually benefit a state.
- Allowing refugees greater freedoms improves the host country's international reputation.
- Money going into camps could be better utilized for development by extending its effects into the local community and creating sustainable livelihoods for refugees and the host community, reducing the need for ongoing reliance on relief that is unsustainable.
- Refugees who have gained skills and assets in exile will be in a better position to contribute to

regional peace and security as well as regional economic growth when they repatriate.<sup>7</sup> Today's refugees will likely be tomorrow's neighbors, thus states can benefit by investing in refugees now so as to increase the potential for good neighbors in the future.

#### ***A Need for the Host Community to Benefit***

If development programs for refugees are to gain the support of host governments, host communities must also benefit. Under the current system, refugees in camps typically receive a significantly disproportionate level of assistance compared to their host country

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counterparts, which causes resentment and animosity.<sup>8</sup> The fact that refugees with ration cards are the only ones entitled to receive relief exacerbates differences between refugees and their hosts, discouraging solidarity and joint efforts to improve an area.

Efforts have been made to allow hosts in refugee-affected areas to benefit from services provided to refugees, but benefits are typically residual, for example, allowing hosts to use refugee hospitals. Much more could be done to target hosts and refugees together, allowing both populations to benefit simultaneously from activities such as loan programs and skills training. However, the issue of UNHCR's role in coordinating such programs would need to be reexamined. Because of its refugee-centric mandate, it would seem more prudent for UNHCR to focus on its advocacy and protection role once the emergency phase has passed. Development agencies that are not constrained by refugee-centric mandates are better placed to assist war-affected populations as a whole. In addition, more could be done to explore the possibilities of utilizing the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as a coordinating organization, tying development programs in refugee-affected areas to the overall development initiatives of the host country.

***A Need for a Development Focus in Assistance Programs***

While relief to refugees in camps remains the primary assistance strategy, UNHCR has made at least some efforts to allow refugees to participate in development programs. Jeff Crisp's historical survey of UNHCR's involvement in development demonstrates that in the late 1970s and early 1980s the agency dabbled in development.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, the agency abandoned this agenda in order to focus on emergency operations in famine areas in Africa and repatriation programs in the post-Cold War era.

A less aggressive approach taken by UNHCR has been to address the need for a progression toward development by assigning one sector of relief programs to oversee community concerns and development needs. Evolving out of UNHCR's social services sector, by the late 1980s the community services sector was put in place in response to UNHCR's recognition of the need to link relief aid with long-term development and to shift from individual case management to community-based approaches to refugee assistance.<sup>10</sup>

Community services is distinguished from other assistance activities in that it purports to allow refugees to take part in decision-making and builds on their capabilities rather than focusing on their

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needs. The goals of community services are as follows: "To restore the refugees' humanity and dignity, to enable them to take decisions, to restore a sense of security, to create a sense of belonging, and to rebuild a self-generating community."<sup>11</sup> UNHCR took a step further in its February 2001 Community Development Policy, stating that community development principles should be incorporated into all sectors of refugee assistance such that refugees would participate as primary problem solvers with UNHCR playing the role of facilitator.<sup>12</sup> To date, it appears that the implementation of the development

policy has been confined to the community services sector and has not significantly affected operations in other sectors. Activities coordinated under community services typically include vocational skills training, loan programs, livestock and poultry projects, adult education, care for vulnerable refugees, AIDS awareness programs, environmental protection programs, and other community initiatives.

While UNHCR's community services function appears to hold the keys to increased development opportunities for refugees, it has been sadly under-prioritized by UNHCR as a whole. In the Coordinating Action on Small Arms (CASA) report<sup>13</sup> significant attention is given to UNHCR budgetary trends that demonstrate that community services are increasingly less of a priority to the organization. Community services has become a sector where miscellaneous activities that do not fit under other programs can be conveniently stashed. Yet while its responsibilities increase, its funding does not. In interviews, UNHCR and Christian Outreach, Relief, and Development (CORD<sup>14</sup>) community service officers in Tanzania and Zambia expressed frustrations that community services is viewed as a soft sector and that when budget cuts occur it is often the first to be affected.

A number of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have gained a great deal of experience in implementing community services that could assist UNHCR in their programs.<sup>15</sup> However, while these organizations are trying to operate on a development basis that seeks to empower from the bottom up, they are hampered by UNHCR's relief systems that deliver from the top down. Community services calls for refugee participation but this seems to be sadly lacking in UNHCR's dominant approach to refugee assistance. As a result, development tends to be treated as an item to be delivered to the refugee population rather than a slow process of building refugees' capacity and encouraging sustainability. Thus, while the community services sector is entrusted with encouraging community solutions to community problems, it is too weak to impose required changes in management and decision-making styles on the agency as a whole. If the organization wants to be effective in responding to refugees' evolving development needs, the role of community services should be strengthened and prioritized, not squeezed out.

But more fundamentally, the question of whether or not UNHCR should undertake development programs in refugee-affected areas will need to be addressed sooner or later. UNHCR does not have a mandate for development work, nor does it have

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the expertise. However, it is not clear who else would coordinate ongoing programs in protracted situations. Expectations for radical reforms are unrealistic in a bureaucracy like UNHCR that is held hostage to donor agendas, but efforts could be made to form better linkages with development agencies that could take over programs from UNHCR once they have evolved beyond the emergency phase.

Donor education should also be a priority. Donors typically prefer short-term, quick fix solutions rather than committing funding to a long, slow process that lacks a sense of urgency. In addition, as other options for more effective refugee assistance are explored, it is crucial that donors and policymakers recognize that development initiatives, while more efficient than relief in the long run, are not a cheap solution. Initially development programs would require significant inputs, although it is unlikely these would be more costly than the current relief system. In any case, the primary goal should be to use currently available resources more effectively by redirecting them for development purposes rather than soliciting new funds.

### **A Need for Refugee Cooperation**

While alternatives to providing long-term relief are desperately needed, it should not be automatically assumed that refugees will want to forfeit relief entitlements in order to participate in development programs. Evaluations of community services programs in Zambia<sup>16</sup> and Tanzania,<sup>17</sup> which gave attention to refugee perspectives, revealed that many refugees evaluate the effectiveness of a program in terms of

what material gains they receive, not in terms of how well the program facilitates their development or their self-reliance. Relief programs are the visible face of UNHCR to refugees, so from their perspective the organization primarily exists to provide for their material needs. Self-reliance programs should not be a euphemism for UNHCR budget cuts and the withdrawal of resources. In addition, refugee expectations must also be addressed. Frustrations are likely to mount when people think they have something coming to them that is then taken away without sufficient notice or explanation.

Another problem to address is that refugees may lack a sense of commitment to participation in a development process in exile because they are intent on going home as soon as possible. It is important for people to take ownership of projects if those projects are to be sustainable, but it is difficult to foster a feeling of ownership in a group of people who anticipate that their situation is temporary. As a result, community development in a refugee context may need to take on other forms. In Zambia, where Angolan refugees are expected to repatriate in the next year or two, CORD's community services sector is developing programs to give refugees ownership of a revolving micro-loan program with the idea that refugees themselves will know who is likely to pay back the loan

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before repatriating. At the same time, it is hoped that recipients of loans will be able to generate both sufficient capital and business experience that will be useful to them when they return to Angola. The goal is to utilize community development principles to more effectively assist people in transition who will eventually be responsible for the development of Angola.

Finally, a community development approach assumes that a cohesive community exists, but romantic notions of refugees all working together to help one another are simply unrealistic and can be dangerous. In some respects, a purist 'community development' model is based on a socialist point of view where everyone shares equally and looks after the good of those in their community. However, refugee communities are typically a mix of people from different ethnic groups and socio-economic and educational backgrounds who come together with various agendas and ideas for doing things. There are strong people and weak people, and sometimes leaders look for ways to profit that further disadvantage the weak. Yet, acknowledging these differences may place community development programs in a better position to address inequities than direct assistance systems that do not recognize community hierarchies.<sup>18</sup>

### **CASE STUDIES**

The following case studies will outline the way in which refugee crises in three African host countries, Ghana, Tanzania, and Zambia, have exemplified a victim assistance approach. In each case, the policies of the host countries, the type of assistance given to refugees, and the factors that have either facilitated or impeded the development process, will be explored. In addition, considerations will be made for how each case could be better managed for the benefit of hosts and refugees. The three case studies provide a spectrum of possible responses to protracted refugee situations. Although the studies focus on Africa, the general principles laid out for improving refugee assistance programs are applicable to protracted situations globally.

### **LIBERIAN REFUGEES IN GHANA**

Liberian refugees began arriving in Ghana in 1990 soon after the Liberian civil war began. The first arrivals were Liberians who were able to board planes and ships intended to evacuate Ghanaian nationals living in Liberia.<sup>19</sup> Those who subsequently followed, while not as well-to-do as the first arrivals, had sufficient resources to travel two countries away from Liberia to seek asylum. As a result, although they might have come with little by way of material resources, arrivals to Ghana were not the poorest, most desperate of Liberia's population. This calls into

question the 'needy victim' stereotype routinely alluded to in Ghana's rhetoric about the Liberian refugees they host.

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struggles, Ghana was not equipped with systems and policies to address the needs of a large influx of refugees. Therefore, Ghana's refugee policy has developed significantly in response to the Liberian crisis. The government made land available to refugees at Buduburam, located near Accra in Ghana's Central Region, and all Liberian refugees were transported to this location upon arrival and granted refugee status on a prima facie basis.<sup>20</sup>

Initially, Ghanaian nationals, including concerned individuals and church groups, came to the aid of the refugees. However, as numbers swelled, the Ghanaian government "felt overburdened with the challenge of hospitality for the thousands of refugees who entered the country."<sup>21</sup> Requiring external assistance, they invited UNHCR to provide emergency relief to the refugees. Aid agencies arrived in full force, providing food, shelter, medical, and educational services to the refugees, many bedraggled from long and dangerous journeys by sea. As time passed, UNHCR assistance shifted from the emergency phase to care and maintenance programs. By 1996 at the end of Liberia's civil war, the number of Liberian refugees being assisted in Ghana had reached approximately 20,000.<sup>22</sup>

Upon the democratic election of Charles Taylor in Liberia in 1997, UNHCR responded by scaling down care and maintenance programs in order to facilitate voluntary repatriation. However, only 3,597 refugees agreed to participate in the repatriation program from

1996 to 1999. Reports are that many of these refugees eventually made their way back to Ghana, preferring life in a refugee camp to life in Liberia where social services basically no longer function and where security remains tenuous at best. In addition, a resettlement program to the United States appears to act as a pull, encouraging old caseload refugees to try their luck at getting to the United States as well as attracting new arrivals who also want to benefit from the resettlement program.<sup>23</sup>

Recognizing that repatriation was not occurring on a large scale, UNHCR ceased the program in 1999 and began to phase out the care and maintenance programs for Liberian refugees. By June 2000, all assistance to Liberian refugees in Ghana was withdrawn in accordance with a regional UNHCR policy, primarily due to budget cuts. Surprisingly, malnutrition rates and death rates in the camp did not appear to rise. Instead, Liberian refugees have responded to the withdrawal of assistance by engaging in their own development initiatives, some of them utilizing skills learned in vocational skills training offered under the UNHCR-sponsored community services program.

Liberian refugees do have some notable advantages over refugee populations in other African countries, which facilitate their development opportunities in Ghana.<sup>24</sup> These include the following:

- Refugees have freedom to exercise their social and economic rights, including the right of movement.
- Refugees live in close proximity to an urban center where they can access markets and educational and employment opportunities when available.
- A significant number of refugees are able to access remittances through well-developed social networks in the United States.

The combination of these factors has made it possible for Liberians to stimulate the local economy in the environs of the camp, and it appears that living conditions at the refugee camp are on par with, if not better than, conditions in the surrounding Ghanaian communities. It would seem a ‘fortunate accident’ that aid was available in the early years of Liberians’ exile in Ghana but then dwindled, facilitating refugee self-sufficiency.<sup>25</sup>

However, merely to be off the UNHCR beneficiary list does not necessarily equal self-reliance for all

refugees. Not all Liberian refugees benefit equally from remittances and other economic opportunities. Many continue to struggle to provide their basic needs and are now facing the same challenges of high unemployment, inflation, and lack of educational and economic opportunity that Ghanaian nationals face.

Ironically, at a time when Liberian refugees, and indeed the host community, could best benefit from development programs, the Ghanaian government has chosen to continue viewing Liberian refugees as a burden rather than recognizing them as assets to the Ghanaian economy. The Ghanaian government is aware that UNHCR assists host countries by provid-

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ing relief assistance to needy refugees, not development assistance to refugee entrepreneurs. Thus the Ghanaian government has petitioned for what they can get, not necessarily what would be most useful to themselves and to the refugees. In interviews with members of the Refugee Board, it was made clear that Ghana expected UNHCR to provide relief assistance to all refugees in Ghana until the time of repatriation. Recognizing to their great dismay that UNHCR had no intentions of resuming assistance to the residual caseload, the Ghana Refugee Board decided to conduct a screening process to determine which Liberians still had a legitimate claim to refugee status. Of 9,000 family heads screened in 2001, 3,449 were granted refugee status and the Refugee Board expected that UNHCR would resume assistance to this caseload.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, those denied refugee status remain in Ghana as de facto refugees and aid has not been forthcoming from UNHCR.

Given the degree of economic activity evident at the camp, the resumption of relief to the residual caseload would likely be very misplaced. However, development programs such as micro-credit schemes

would be welcomed by the refugees and could play a key role in assisting those who continue to struggle to meet their daily needs. In addition, refugees are already running their own schools and vocational training programs. Any added support to these projects would greatly benefit the community without undermining refugee self-help initiatives. With relatively less restrictive refugee policy in place, it is highly likely that the Ghanaian government would invite any programs that would foster increased development in Buduburam camp and the surrounding Ghanaian community, but donors and development agencies need to be convinced.

### **CONGOLESE AND BURUNDIAN REFUGEES IN TANZANIA**

In Tanzania, the situation is more complicated given the large numbers of refugees the country hosts. In the 1960s, Tanzania generously provided Rwandan and Burundian refugees with land and allowed them to access educational and employment opportunities on par with Tanzanian nationals. However, in the 1990s, as refugee numbers increased to half a million—350,000 from Burundi and 120,000 from the Congo—the Tanzanian government changed its strat-

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egy, preferring to contain refugees in twelve camps scattered across Western Tanzania.<sup>27</sup>

Because Tanzania struggles to meet the needs of even its own nationals, UNHCR has responded by taking total responsibility for the care and maintenance of Tanzania's refugee population. As would be expected, the costs of such an operation are prohibitive. In 2001, UNHCR made appeals for \$32 million to fund its programs, and in 2002, the agency asked for \$24.7 million.<sup>28</sup> Meanwhile, the refugee-feeding operation, which covers both Kigoma and Kagera regions, is said to cost upwards of \$1 million per week, or over \$52 million for a year.<sup>29</sup> Donors have proved unwilling to sustain these costs. As a result,

UNHCR has substantially cut the 2003 budget for Western Tanzania and has asked all implementing partners to cut staff posts.<sup>30</sup> In the face of these budget cuts, it appears that Tanzania will have to start looking for other alternatives to sustain its refugee population.

Moving things in a new direction, EuropeAid Cooperation Office (AIDCO), a humanitarian arm of the European Delegation, is funding international NGOs to do development work among refugees in Tanzania, but efforts are at an embryonic stage. Meanwhile, UNHCR-supported community services programs in the camps are also supporting refugee initiatives with the goal of encouraging self-reliance. However, programs are squeezed into the more dominant structure of relief and are severely limited by Tanzanian policy that restricts the following:<sup>31</sup>

- Refugees cannot own land.<sup>32</sup> In Lugufu, where approximately 70,000 Congolese are hosted, refugee households are given plots as small as 7.5 by 10 meters, and in Nyarugusu, which has a population of approximately 50,000, refugees are given 10 by 25 meter plots. Lack of access to land coupled with the poor soil conditions makes it almost impossible for refugees to benefit from agricultural production.
- Refugees do not have the right to freedom of movement, which severely restricts refugee access to markets. A limited number of people can obtain permits from the camp manager to travel outside the camps, but permits are typically difficult to get and are only given for three days at a time. If a refugee is caught outside the camp area without a permit, the penalty is six months in jail.
- Refugees do not have the legal right to work. Refugees are said to be involved in casual labor, but their efforts are done strictly on an informal basis, and refugees are susceptible to exploitative wages, which they have no legal rights to contest.

Ironically, each of these rights is safeguarded in treaties that the Tanzania government has signed. A case could be made that Tanzania is in violation of these treaties,<sup>33</sup> but refugees cannot complain because they are not parties to the treaties. Only other states could contest.

Refugee rights and relief programs are restricted because Tanzania does not want refugees to integrate locally on grounds of limited resources and due to

national security concerns, both real and perceived.<sup>34</sup> Increased crime and banditry in Western Tanzania have been linked to refugees, and the government has repeatedly expressed concerns that the conflict in Burundi could spill over into Tanzania if not carefully monitored. Other factors contributing to the host's unwillingness to allow local integration include fears that if refugees are given land they may never go home. Or worse, that refugees may reap benefits at Tanzania's expense and then return home leaving Tanzania with no net gains for its hospitality.

Certainly, Tanzania's preference for repatriation cannot be ignored, but these concerns are not sufficient to justify or sustain continuous relief. Refugee assistance programs could provide more support to

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refugee initiatives and build up the market economy within the camps. Refugees are capable of taking more control of their lives and the programs meant to assist them if given the chance. In addition, aid agencies coordinating community service programs in Tanzania have gained expertise in facilitating development among refugee-affected populations to the degree that is currently possible. However, if progress is to be made, the host government must be convinced that allowing refugees more freedoms and more development opportunities would benefit Tanzania more than the current system.

#### **ANGOLAN AND CONGOLESE REFUGEES IN ZAMBIA**

Zambia hosts a large number of refugees and holds the distinction of having the oldest refugee settlement in Africa at Mayukwayukwa, where Angolan refugees have been living since 1966. Today, Zambia hosts a total of about 150,000 refugees in camps and

settlements, of which 100,000 are Angolan and 45,000 are Congolese.<sup>35</sup> In three of the camps, Mayukwayukwa, Kala, and Ukwimi, which host approximately 70,000 refugees, the government has established refugee settlements where each household is allocated land for cultivation and is expected to produce its own food. The remaining 80,000 refugees are hosted in Mwange, Kala, and Nangweshi camps<sup>36</sup> with little or no land allocated for cultivation. Refugees in Zambia who have access to land are well ahead of their landless counterparts, but restrictions on refugee movement and their right to work continue to limit their capabilities.<sup>37</sup> Because of these limitations, UNHCR currently continues to fund care and maintenance programs in Zambia's refugee settlements and camps. Community service programs in the camps suffer the same setbacks as those in Tanzania because of similar host government policy. However, now that peace has returned to Angola, UNHCR is preparing itself for a repatriation program to assist Angolans to return home in 2003.

In this state of flux, with refugees likely to return home, it seems ironic that the Zambian government is in the throes of developing a new local integration policy called the Zambia Initiative (ZI), introduced in March of 2002. Assuming that not all refugees will go home, this program appears to be an encouraging step forward that aspires "to build on the positive aspects of refugees, by including them in its attempts to alleviate poverty in the refugee hosting areas in the Western Province."<sup>38</sup> The policy goes on to state, "The refugees through this initiative and their integration with the host communities will become vehicles of development in these areas, and shall not be viewed only as passive recipients of relief aid."<sup>39</sup> UNHCR has agreed to assist by helping to identify potential donors and to provide monitoring support while the Zambian government works with local development committees comprised of refugees and local Zambians to undertake development projects proposed at a grass roots level.<sup>40</sup>

On the surface, the ZI appears to be an innovative approach to refugee assistance, but a number of concerns regarding the implementation of the ZI should be flagged. First, while government policy as expressed in the ZI seems to favor local integration, Zambia's new Refugee Act of 2002, filed into parliament on November 29, 2002, still retains restrictions

on freedom of movement and employment for refugees. This discrepancy looks suspiciously like a shrewd compromise that will allow Zambia to utilize the refugees' presence for its own development while keeping refugees confined to restricted areas and limiting the degree of integration possible.

Second, it is not entirely clear what UNHCR will be responsible to monitor, how it will go about monitoring, and whether or not it even has the capacity to monitor a development approach to refugee assistance. Added to that, systems for how the local development committees will operate have been decided upon by the ZI Program Management Unit, and it

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*Containment in camps is proving unsustainable in terms of funding and is counter-productive for building human resource potential and improving conditions in refugee-affected areas. Now is the time to explore new assistance options.*

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appears that the committees have not been adequately involved in the planning process. While it is too early to judge the effectiveness of the proposed program, it seems likely that the success of the program could be jeopardized if refugees and host communities feel that it has been imposed on them. Development requires proactive participants in a process, not passive recipients of that process as defined by others.

The objectives of the ZI appear to correspond closely to Uganda's Self-Reliance Strategy (SRS), launched in 1999, which has been met with mixed results according to CASA's report.<sup>41</sup> Lacking the means and the technical capacity to meet the development needs of the refugee hosting areas, UNHCR has largely left other development agencies to implement the SRS. Unfortunately, there is reportedly little evidence so far that these other agencies will take the initiative in helping to make the SRS a success without considerably greater investment and leadership from UNHCR or another more capable coordinating organization. If these problems have been encountered in Uganda's program, it seems highly likely that the ZI will face similar challenges. The ZI and the

SRS have the potential to be the next trend in addressing ongoing development needs in refugee-affected areas, but special care should be taken to build on lessons learned rather than to repeat mistakes from one country to the next.

### CHANGING THE EQUATION

This paper began by postulating an ideal scenario of relief programs for refugees during their first months in exile with ongoing development opportunities to follow. Starting with the ideal and then working backwards to examine the obstacles impeding the ideal provides a way to consider more carefully the complex realities that need to be addressed in order to work toward improved assistance systems. Rather than abandoning the ideal, efforts should be made to find where the interests of host governments, host communities, aid agencies, donors, and refugees intersect. Clearly there are no easy answers, but that should not lead us to complacent acceptance of the current system without considering better alternatives.

Although UNHCR has an established mandate that does not change, it must be recognized that the agency is an evolving one. Explained from a geopolitical perspective, after World War II the policy of Western states shifted from the neglect of refugees in non-European states to the use of refugees as pawns in Cold War politics, to their containment in camps now.<sup>42</sup> State policies likewise are not static but respond to changing political opportunities and concerns that can and should be harnessed for the benefit of refugees. Containment in camps is proving unsustainable in terms of funding and is counter-

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productive for building human resource potential and improving conditions in refugee-affected areas. Now is the time to explore new assistance options.

If policies do shift toward a development focus with refugee self-reliance as a goal, it is essential that these programs provide refugees with tangible alternatives for sustaining themselves. Self-reliance programs should not be a euphemism for UNHCR budget cuts and the withdrawal of resources. In addition, refugee expectations must also be addressed. Frustrations are likely to mount when people think they have something coming to them and it is then taken away without sufficient notice or explanation.

## CONCLUSION

The critiques of the refugee assistance regime laid out in this paper are not particularly new, but I have attempted to move the discussion beyond critiques toward a consideration of how improvements could be made. Convincing host countries that it is in their best interest to view refugees as potential assets rather than as a total cost is fundamental to progress. If refugees are granted greater socio-economic rights, they will be better able to negotiate their own opportunities. Funding and technical support for vocational skills training, job-creation, and micro-credit programs along with other community initiatives will likely lead to positive changes in refugee-affected areas. From my perspective, whatever improvements are pursued should meet the following criteria:

- Allow UNHCR to focus more exclusively on refugee protection and advocacy for increased refugee rights with the aim of avoiding large-scale, protracted relief programs in camps.
- Build on the existing expertise of development

agencies that have experience working with refugee and refugee-affected populations.

- Give refugees more control over their own lives than is presently the case in the relief system.
- Take the ideas and input of both refugees and host communities into consideration when planning development and/or local integration programs.
- Utilize refugees as an asset rather than a cost to host countries.
- Equip refugees with skills, abilities, and economic opportunities that they can utilize either in exile or at home when they repatriate.

Refugees have long been viewed as an anomaly, a special case to be treated with special measures. Indeed, conflict situations require emergency interventions. However, becoming a refugee does not mean that one's life should be put on hold in a refugee camp for years on end. On the contrary, refugees should be allowed to make decisions and contribute to their own opportunities as well as to the development of their local communities in exile just as they would if at home. Refugee assistance programs will likely not become less expensive. But if we are wise, we will seek ways to use our resources to make investments in refugees that will yield local, national, and regional returns rather than underutilizing our resources to maintain 'victims.' The equation will change only when we begin to welcome the presence of refugees as a benefit to host countries and capitalize on their presence as an opportunity for increased development. ■

## NOTES

- 1 While it is difficult to provide definitive figures, it is generally acknowledged that some refugees prefer to bypass official assistance and settle themselves amongst the local population.
- 2 Jeff Crisp, "No Solutions in Sight: The Problem of Protracted Refugee Situations in Africa," UNHCR: New Issues in Refugee Research Working Paper No. 75 (2003): 21.
- 3 Karen Jacobsen, "The Forgotten Solution: Local Integration for Refugees in Developing Countries," UNHCR: New Issues in Refugee Research Working Paper No. 45 (2001). Richard Black, "Putting Refugees in Camps," *Forced Migration Review* (1998). Barbara Harrell-Bond, "Camps: Literature Review," *Forced Migration Review* 1, no. 2 (1998). Arafat Jamal, "Minimum Standards and Essential Needs in a Protracted Refugee Situation: A Review of the Unhcr Program in Kakuma, Kenya," (Geneva: UNHCR Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit, 2000). Barb Wigley, "Between Homes, between Paradigms" (paper presented at the 8th

- Annual IASFM Conference, Chaing Main, Thailand, January 2003), and Crisp, "No Solutions in Sight: The Problem of Protracted Refugee Situations in Africa."
- 4 Crisp, "No Solutions in Sight: The Problem of Protracted Refugee Situations in Africa," 2-3.
- 5 Wigley, "Between Homes, between Paradigms", 3.
- 6 Oliver Bakewell, "Refugee Aid and Protection in Rural Africa: Working in Parallel or Cross-Purposes," UNHCR: New Issues in Refugee Research March (2001): 2.
- 7 Jacobsen, "The Forgotten Solution: Local Integration for Refugees in Developing Countries," 27. Given Hangoma Haacipola, "Looking Beyond: Designing Assistance Programs in Preparation for Repatriation" (paper presented at the 8th Annual IASFM Conference, Chaing Mai, Thailand, July 2003).
- 8 Robert Chambers, "Hidden Losers? The Impact of Rural Refugees and Refugee Programs on Poorer Hosts," *International Migration Review* 20, no. 2 (1986).

- 9 Jeff Crisp, "Mind the Gap! Unhcr, Humanitarian Assistance and the Development Process," *International Migration Review* 35, Spring 2001 (2001).
- 10 CASA, "Toward Community Based Solutions: Evaluation of Unhcr's Community Services Function," (Geneva: UNHCR Evaluation Report, 2001), Appendix 2.
- 11 UNHCR, "Refugee Emergencies: A Community-Based Approach," (Geneva: UNHCR, 1996), 13.
- 12 Bakewell, "Refugee Aid and Protection in Rural Africa: Working in Parallel or Cross-Purposes."
- 13 CASA, "Toward Community Based Solutions: Evaluation of Unhcr's Community Services Function."
- 14 A UK-based NGO and UNHCR implementing partner.
- 15 These include CORD, Save the Children, Jesuit Refugee Services, CARE, Red Cross, Oxfam, Lutheran World Federation, and Norwegian Refugee Council, among others.
- 16 Oliver Bakewell, "Review of Cord Community Services for Angolan Refugees in Western Province, Zambia," (Geneva: UNHCR Evaluation Report, December, 2002).
- 17 Shelly Dick, "Review of Cord Community Services for Congolese Refugees in Tanzania," (Geneva: UNHCR EPAU Evaluation, 2002).
- 18 *Ibid.*, 23-24.
- 19 Shelly Dick, "Liberians in Ghana: Living without Humanitarian Assistance," UNHCR: New Issues in Refugee Research Working Paper No. 57, February (2002): 23.
- 20 Ghana Refugee Board, "the Management of Refugees in Ghana: Help Refugees Help Themselves," (Accra: 1999), 16.
- 21 *Ibid.*
- 22 Dick, "Liberians in Ghana: Living without Humanitarian Assistance," 8.
- 23 *Ibid.*: 39.
- 24 Shelly Dick, "Responding to Protracted Refugee Situations: A Case Study of Liberian Refugees in Ghana," (Geneva: UNHCR Evaluation Report, 2002), 36.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 25-37.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 26-27.
- 27 Dick, "Review of Cord Community Services for Congolese Refugees in Tanzania," 3-4.
- 28 Bakewell, "Review of Cord Community Services for Angolan Refugees in Western Province, Zambia."
- 29 Loren B. Landau, "The Humanitarian Hangover: Transnationalisation of Governmental Practice in Tanzania's Refugee-Populated Areas," UNHCR: New Issues in Refugee Research Working Paper No. 40 (2001): 12.
- 30 Personal communication, 2002.
- 31 Dick, "Review of Cord Community Services for Congolese Refugees in Tanzania," 3-5.
- 32 A minority of Burundian refugees who have lived in Tanzania since the 1960s live on large plots of land that make it possible for them to engage in agricultural activities to sustain themselves without dependence on food rations.
- 33 Freedom of movement is guaranteed in the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, Article 12 and the Banjul Charter, Article 12. Tanzania is a signatory to both with no reservations. In addition, Tanzania is in violation of the provisions of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, Article 17, if they permit other aliens to work in the country but not refugees.
- 34 Dick, "Review of Cord Community Services for Congolese Refugees in Tanzania," 3-5.
- 35 Bakewell, "Review of Cord Community Services for Angolan Refugees in Western Province, Zambia," 6.
- 36 In January 2000, Nangweshi camp was opened to accommodate 14,000 refugees coming from UNITA held areas. Then in October 2001, a second major influx brought an additional 10,000 new refugees to the camp and they were accommodated on land meant for farming. Subsequently, negotiations with local Lozi chiefs have made it possible to give the 10,000 newest arrivals access to farmland at a new extension to Nangweshi main camp. Transfer of these refugees to the new location began in November 2002, but there is not sufficient farmland to accommodate all refugee families (personal observation).
- 37 As with Tanzania, a case could be made that Zambia is in violation of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, the Banjul Charter, and the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. Zambia is a signatory of these treaties without reservations.
- 38 UNHCR Lusaka, "Zambia Initiative: Refugee-Hosting Community Development Program, Co-Operating Partners' Mission Report - 18 to 28 March 2002," (Lusaka, Zambia: UNHCR, 2002), 2.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 17.
- 40 Shelly Dick, "Interview with Mr. Mohammed Elferjani, Zambian Initiative Program Management Unit," (November 6 2002).
- 41 CASA, "Toward Community Based Solutions: Evaluation of Unhcr's Community Services Function," 78-81.
- 42 B.S. Chimni, "The Geopolitics of Refugee Studies; a View from the South," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 2, no. 4 (1988).