

Development Assisted Integration: A Viable Alternative to Long Term Residence in Refugee Camps?

Sara J. Feldman

Since the inception of the refugee protection regime in 1951, refugee camps have been its central organizing concept. In the camp-based model, refugee-producing crises are assumed to be temporary emergencies. In reality, most refugee situations last much longer: 7.89 million of the world's 12 million refugees and asylum seekers have been in camps for five years or more. While camps are necessary in the emergency phase of a refugee crisis, reliance on a camp-centric policy in protracted refugee situations is an inefficient use of resources; causes tension between refugee and local populations; keeps refugees dependent on aid; can lead to health and security crises; and prevents refugees from reentering society and pursuing livelihoods. Development assisted integration (DAI) is an alternative paradigm, which has had some success getting refugees out of camps and moving toward self-sufficiency and greater enjoyment of their rights in protracted crises. However, there remains a lack of research on the viability of such an approach, as well as a number of challenges to implementation. This paper attempts to narrow this research gap by examining past attempts at DAI implementation, assessing the level of success of each effort, and using these examples to identify optimal preconditions for successful DAI implementation.

Introduction

Since the inception of the refugee protection regime, refugee camps have been the central organizing concept. In the camp-based model, refugee-producing crises are mostly assumed to be temporary emergencies in which the camp will serve as an impermanent settlement where refugees' basic needs are met until they can return home, likely within a few months. In reality however, most refugee situations last much longer than this—7.89 million of the world's 12 million refugees and asy-

Sara J. Feldman works for Migration and Refugee Services at the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, where she facilitates the reunification of undocumented unaccompanied minors with family members in the US. She has worked internationally in many countries with immigrants and refugees, and recently received a Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy from The Fletcher School, where she studied international migration, human rights, and public policy.

lum seekers have been in camps for five years or more, and 7.13 million of them have been there for 10 or more years.¹ These “warehoused” populations range from Congolese refugees living in camps for seven years to Palestinians in Gaza, Lebanon, and the West Bank who have been living as refugees for 57 years. Over two million Afghans have been in Iranian and Pakistani camps for 26 years.² While camps are certainly necessary in the emergency phase of a refugee crisis, as well as in a

7.89 million of the world’s 12 million refugees and asylum seekers have been in camps for five years or more, 7,132,200 of them for 10 years or more.

limited capacity afterwards, reliance on a camp-centric policy in protracted refugee situations is an inefficient use of resources, which causes tension between refugee and local populations, keeps refugees dependent on aid, can lead to health and security crises, and prevents refugees from reentering society and pursuing livelihoods.

Considering the protracted nature of most refugee-producing crises and the unsuitability of refugee camps as the primary means for addressing these situations, it is imperative that alternative strategies are tested and, where they are found to be potentially viable and preferable, implemented. One alternative approach to camps, which has had some measure of success, is that

which I will call Development Assisted Integration (DAI). Local integration entails the voluntary settlement of refugees in the communities of the host country. In this model, refugees leave camps either by becoming economically self-sufficient or by choosing to remain after a camp closes and receiving assistance from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). DAI refers to the coordination of refugee assistance with local economic development so that those communities that host refugees can receive additional funding for enabling refugees to settle amongst locals by strengthening the services and livelihood opportunities available to both populations. However, there remains a lack of research on the viability of these kinds of alternatives, the specific challenges to implementing them, and the set of obstacles that stand in the way of selling these alternative policies to UNHCR, host governments, local populations, donors, and refugees.

This article attempts to narrow this research gap by examining in greater detail some examples of local integration approaches with a development component in protracted refugee situations, assessing and analyzing their level of success, and exploring the possibility of applying successful practices to other protracted refugee situations. While I find that, in the right context, with proper planning, and with adequate support, there are numerous protracted refugee situations for which it would be logistically and economically viable to make a shift from a camp-centered policy to one of DAI, there are serious political challenges to implementing such an approach.

Background

According to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Protection of Refugees, a refugee is an individual with a well-founded fear of persecution on the grounds of race, religion, nationality, membership in a social or political group; is outside the country

of his or her origin; and, due to this fear, is unable or unwilling to afford the protection of that country.³ Before proceeding, it will be helpful to distinguish the various groups of displaced persons, which are sometimes referred to as refugees. People who cross a border in flight are officially called asylum seekers, while refugees have been conferred that status by the state based on the definition of a refugee in the 1951 Convention. Because this distinction guarantees a refugee a number of sought after rights, protections, and benefits, host states are reluctant to confer this status. The vast majority of “refugees” in Africa are actually asylum seekers, as they do not have official refugee status, but as is common practice, I will refer to both asylum seekers and those who have been conferred refugee status as refugees.

By the end of 2005 there were 20.8 million people of concern to UNHCR, including refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons, and stateless persons.⁴ Refugees and asylum seekers made up 58 percent of this total in 2005, numbering approximately 12 million.⁵ While the number of refugees in the world grew gradually during the 1970s and dramatically during the 1980s, today that number is decreasing slightly. Refugee and asylum seeker totals in recent years have ranged from 11.5 million in 2004 to 13.5 million in 1998 to 14.9 million in 2001.⁶

UNHCR utilizes and promotes three durable solutions to refugee problems: repatriation, resettlement, and local integration. Repatriation, which is assisting refugees in voluntarily returning home once an area has again become safe, is the preferred solution. Resettlement is a viable option for a very small number of the world’s refugees (84,809 out of 11.5 million total refugees in 2005),⁷ and is intended to be reserved for those who are not secure in the country of first asylum and who would not be safe to return home even if hostilities there ceased. As set out in international refugee conventions, local integration as a durable solution refers to the granting of full and permanent asylum, membership, and residency status by the host government.⁸ Refugees with full residency status enjoy the range of rights established in the 1951 Convention, including the right to work, of access to education and housing, to own property, and to practice one’s own religion.⁹ However, this status is granted to so few refugees in developing countries that, for the purposes of this article, the term local integration will connote the self-settlement or planned settlement of refugees amongst a local population, regardless of their official status.

Camps in Protracted Situations: Pros and Cons

While refugees throughout the world reside in a wide variety of situations ranging from self-settlement among locals with no assistance to residence in enormous, city-like camps such as Kakuma Camp in Kenya, with some 86,000 inhabitants,¹⁰ the refugee camp is the central feature of the current refugee protection and assistance regime. In 2003, 36 percent of the world’s 13.1 million refugees resided in camps, 15 percent in urban areas, and 49 percent dispersed in rural areas or living in an unknown type of settlement. In Africa, almost half the refugees of concern to

The vast majority of “refugees” in Africa are actually asylum seekers, as they do not have official refugee status...

UNHCR are in camps.¹¹ The US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants defines a protracted refugee situation as a population of 10,000 or more restricted to a camp or segregated settlement for five years or longer.¹² As previously mentioned, 7.89 million of the world's 12 million refugees and asylum seekers have been in camps for five years or more, 7.13 million of them having lived there for ten years or more.¹³

While this model is predicated on the notion that refugee flows are temporary, there are many factors that impede refugees from quickly and permanently returning to their home countries. Even after a war has ended, there is always uncertainty

Even after a war has ended, there is always uncertainty as to whether the fighting has reached a definitive end, and a single additional outbreak of tensions can slow the entire process considerably.

as to whether the fighting has reached a definitive end, and a single additional outbreak of tensions can slow the entire process considerably. Though UNHCR often offers generous repatriation packages to refugees in situations in which it is deemed safe for them to return and in which the home country government has invited them, many refugees opt to stay where they are. This is for a variety of reasons including a fear of renewed violence or persecution at home, a lack of economic opportunities in the post-conflict economy in the country of origin, and access to aid if a refugee continues to reside in the camp.¹⁴

Many refugees in camps are severely limited in their ability to move freely in and out of the camp, especially to travel longer distances. Camp populations are often isolated from economic opportunities and dependent upon humanitarian aid for survival. This can have drastic consequences, and can lead to hunger and malnutrition from shortages in needed supplies once the emergency phase of the crisis has ended. In the early stages of a refugee emergency, basic supplies and services are usually plentiful, or at least sufficient to meet the refugees' needs. However, after the emergency phase of a refugee situation is over, humanitarian aid often drops off significantly. Since refugee assistance donations are voluntary in the UN system, the less visible situations naturally receive less assistance. The restriction on movement also keeps refugees from responding to the pull of the labor market on a national scale, preventing those with demanded skills from migrating to areas of the country where they would best be able to employ them while contributing to the local economy.¹⁵ As camps are often allocated the least productive land and are located far from centers of economic activity, opportunities for generating income or sustaining oneself without traveling some distance can be quite limited.

Refugee camps also have a number of negative effects on the host governments that house them. Since they are expensive to build and maintain and are usually destroyed after the refugees leave, camps are a waste of scarce international aid. With respect to security, camps have, in a few instances, become bases for military opposition activity and enclaves of political ferment, though usually only if the refugees' home country has a history of conflict with the host country. The maintenance of camps also

places a financial and political burden on host states, a burden that is not adequately shouldered by the international community once the emergency phase is over.

Camps, whose services are offered only to refugee residents and not to the surrounding local community, tend to undermine local services by paying higher wages and luring away the most qualified staff.¹⁶ This can lead to resentment on the part of locals, as does the presence, in some cases, of higher quality services for those in the camp. In order to prevent this resentment, UNHCR's policy is to "harmonize" the standard of living of the refugees with that of the local population in order to ensure that there is parity between the two; however, when nearby populations' are little better than starving, this can be a difficult mandate.¹⁷ As well as causing resentment, these parallel systems are highly inefficient. When a refugee camp is founded, an entire new structure is usually created for the delivery of services to refugees, separate from the structures that provide for the needs of locals. In this model, locals and refugees receive the same services, but at differing levels of quality and through different infrastructures. Refugees tend to have access to better health care and education services, while locals usually possess economic opportunities inaccessible to refugees. When a camp closes, its physical infrastructure along with its services, such as clinics and schools are often destroyed, leaving nothing behind for the locals. This is an enormous waste of resources.¹⁸

Camps, whose services are offered only to refugee residents and not to the surrounding local community, tend to undermine local services by paying higher wages and luring away the most qualified staff.

Despite the many drawbacks of a camp-centric approach in protracted refugee situations, there remains a useful role for camps even after they have served as an appropriate and necessary tool in the emergency stage of a refugee crisis. For example, they can be utilized by elderly or sick refugees without families who need medical care or free housing. Camps are also good places to provide services like family reunification and resettlement, and are very efficient mechanisms for distributing aid as quickly as possible to large numbers of people.¹⁹ In other situations, whether temporary or protracted, there is no local population with which to integrate, so encampment is the only viable solution.

The downside of encampment in protracted situations must be considered in terms of other available options. To understand the short-term incentives that might lead refugees to stay in camps instead of integrating locally, it is important to understand the context in which they make these choices. In many instances, the standard of living in the camps is higher than that which the refugees left behind in their home communities. In some camps, refugees can pursue economic opportunities, both inside the camp and outside of it, when host countries allow freedom of movement. Camps can also have a positive economic impact on the surrounding community by employing locals and providing services to them in instances where parallel service systems have been eliminated.²⁰

Local Integration in Protracted Situations: Examples, Successes and Failures

To begin assessing the viability of the DAI model in protracted refugee situations, this article will examine the different approaches that some developing countries have taken to refugee integration, particularly those with a development component prioritizing self-sufficiency amongst refugees. This article will compare these programs, weigh their strengths and weaknesses, and consider common themes, experiences and lessons toward an assessment of DAI's viability as an alternative to refugee camps in protracted situations.

The fundamental premise of an approach combining refugee integration and development projects is that both refugees and the host state can benefit from the integration of refugees into the local community. Integration holds additional appeal for those who believe that keeping refugees

The fundamental premise of an approach combining refugee integration and development projects is that both refugees and the host state can benefit from the integration of refugees into the local community.

in camps indefinitely violates their rights, limits their economic and development potential, or represents a waste of scarce resources. While refugee flows can place an enormous burden on host countries, such crises also offer opportunities for economic development. A refugee influx constitutes an arrival of people with skills that can be utilized to benefit the host state. These individuals also have surplus time that could be used to benefit the host country, such as the development of unused agricultural land for medium to large scale production. The arrival of refugees can also be a public relations asset, showing that the host government is honoring its legal commitments as a responsible member of the international community—all the while garnering international aid. Hosting refugees can also mean the development and construction of infrastructure the host country need not pay for and that will last long after the refugees are gone, such as roads and services.

According to Robert Gorman, there are “numerous cases where refugee populations have, on balance, contributed more to the development of their host nation than they have to its impoverishment. In Tanzania and Rwanda, for example, refugees [in the 1960s and 70s] have stimulated agricultural development and regional commercial growth.”²¹

Zonal Development

Zonal development was the first attempt at linking refugee aid and development. Originating in the development community in the 1960s, it was conceived as a mechanism for sharing the burden of hosting refugees, a burden disproportionately shouldered by African countries, and as a way to ameliorate some of the negative developmental consequences of refugee flows on those countries. In this model, the areas of a country that host refugees are funded directly; rather than channeling

the refugee assistance funds through the central government, which would then earmark the funds for refugee development. The goal of zonal development was not only to enable refugees to become self sufficient, but also to create structures and opportunities for them to earn income as they improved the quality of life for the local community.²² This approach was marginally successful at first, but was not sustained, largely because there was not enough coordination between refugee and development organizations and because the projects did not do enough to benefit locals as well as refugees.²³

The first zonal development project was initiated in 1963 by UNHCR and the International Labor Organization (ILO) in the eastern Kivu region of Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), where significant numbers of Rwandans had fled after the conflict there. In this case, the ILO was the operating agency of the “Rural Integration and Zonal Plan” with UNHCR acting as its partner. While immediately plagued by severe security issues due to violence in the area, the project was making positive economic progress by 1966, with the development activities paying taxes to the government. In return, the settlements were benefiting from government assistance with education and road building.²⁴

A similar project began in Burundi with Rwandan refugees in 1964 and experienced considerable initial success. With 100,000 Congolese refugees participating in the project, the Burundian zonal development was originally supported by UNHCR and then increasingly funded and led by UN development agencies. A Belgian development NGO served as the operating partner, while financial contributions from Oxfam and other NGOs helped get the project off to a good start. Yet after three years, project costs totaled \$3 million, while by 1968 the annual value of crops produced there had averaged only about \$1.5 million.²⁵

Enthusiasm for this approach initially ran very high, especially in the development community, as both projects showed considerable achievements during their first few years. While the Burundian development project did help refugees establish subsistence self-sufficiency and created a modest social infrastructure, which benefited both refugees and locals, it ultimately failed. The project did not last beyond its initial few years as a result of poor land selection, mismanagement, ill-defined objectives, a lack of understanding of refugees’ and locals’ needs, hostilities resulting from the locals’ resentment over the refugees’ “privileged” status, and Burundi’s 1971 political upheaval. Ultimately, the project did not benefit the local population enough to win their support, nor did it have a longer-term plan for integrating cash crops into the local economy and generating alternative sources of revenue in the event that agriculture was not viable during certain periods of time.²⁶ Further, the implementation was rushed because UNHCR and the NGOs involved saw their

The goal of zonal development was not only to enable refugees to become self sufficient, but also to create structures and opportunities for them to earn income as they improved the quality of life for the local community.

roles in the project as temporary and quickly transferred full responsibility to the Burundian government before it was ready.²⁷

These outcomes led many researchers and practitioners to conclude that these types of programs must do more than focus solely on livelihoods and development at the subsistence level to be effective. Many also thought future initiatives should attempt to integrate the efforts of UNHCR and UNDP.²⁸ Meanwhile, these projects' lack of success was also attributed to host countries' political conflicts, indicating that assisted development assisted integration is not viable in the midst of serious conflict.²⁹

Organized Settlements

From the late 1960s to the 1980s, UNHCR established planned rural settlements for refugees in Africa with the goal of having refugees in protracted situations achieve self-sufficiency. Essentially, these settlements were similar to refugee camps but provided opportunities to generate income and attain self-sufficiency. Unlike zonal developments, which were conceived as a kind of permanent solution, they did not aspire

to extend services to locals or benefit the overall area of refugee settlement, but were instead intended to enable refugees to support themselves without local integration until they could return home.

to extend services to locals or benefit the overall area of refugee settlement, but were instead intended to enable refugees to support themselves without local integration until they could return home. In the meanwhile, the settlements would benefit the host country's economy through the cultivation of unused arable land. Between 1964 and 1979, exactly 699,371 refugees were assisted through programs of organized and spontaneous settlements, not including camps with small-scale agriculture and crafts programs such as those in Somalia.³⁰

As with zonal developments, the settlement concept was based on the idea that an inflow of refugees could increase income for the host country by increasing its total number of consumers and producers, leading to an increased demand for consumption and capital goods.³¹ The settlement model, however, went a step further in this regard and addressed the fact that the economy in question must be able to absorb these inputs. Many African refugee-hosting countries, with serious structural economic problems, were not able to do that even when the inputs were available. Rural settlements were envisioned as a way to help the host countries absorb those inputs (refugees and aid) and direct them toward the areas in which they could be of most benefit to the econ-

omy, matching potential workers with underused arable land. While residence in settlements did not allow refugees to access the full range of rights accorded them in the 1951 Convention, it did allow them greater potential for economic self-sufficiency

than they had experienced in camps. However, the settlement movement was much less focused on the interests of the local population than zonal development, usually creating services just for refugees and doing nothing to strengthen those of the local community.

Planned settlements afforded both refugees and the host governments a greater sense of security than self-settlement because they concentrated the refugees spatially and could offer them more protection than they would have had outside of them. They were also visible enough to attract donor support.³² Additionally, settlements reduced maintenance costs for governments in comparison to camps and helped prevent refugees from becoming long-term dependents.³³ However, settlements have many of the same drawbacks as camps, in that they keep refugees separated from the local population, restrict their freedom of movement, and create infrastructure that is likely to be destroyed or go unused once the refugees depart. At the same time, governments may be reluctant to do anything that encourages refugees to stay indefinitely or that inadvertently encourages the arrival of new refugees.³⁴ Such fears may well leave them hesitant to implement a settlement model.

In Tanzania in the 1960s, refugees were naturalized as the country pursued a rural village settlement scheme similar to the national development program implemented with locals in rural areas.³⁵ While refugee settlements were separate from local ones, they were well supplied with services and were less costly than camps in neighboring countries.³⁶ While the Tanzanian settlement example is an impressive one, its success was due largely to the attitude and policies of the host government; as Tanzanian leader Julius Nyerere turned his beliefs about communal economics and African solidarity into refugee policy—largely without accountability to the Tanzanian people or their wishes. Local resistance to refugee settlements was less than in other countries partly because the Tanzanian government's policies toward refugees were similar to its policies toward rural nationals, who were also compelled to reside in rural settlements. Further, there truly was an abundance of unused agricultural land.³⁷ In this case, as in the case of Sudan, the host government contributed the land, infrastructure, and services while other governments contributed operational and technical resources, and UNHCR and NGOs assisted with funding and implementation.³⁸ Without the generous contributions and commitment of the host governments in these cases, even a relative degree of the success would not have been possible. The serious commitment by UNHCR and the NGO community, most notably Oxfam and the Christian Refugee Service,³⁹ also contributed to the success of Tanzania's settlement program.

In Sudan, the settlements included wage-earning programs that provided "guest worker" status to refugees and brought underused land into production. With an open door asylum policy supported by the national refugee settlement program, all refugees were to be assisted in setting up residence in organized settlements, which

... settlements reduced maintenance costs for governments in comparison to camps and helped prevent refugees from becoming long-term dependents.

provided education, training, and income generation activities. Although there were two basic kinds of settlements—land and wage earning—the Sudanese settlements were mostly based on agriculture, though parallel services were also still in existence. Twenty-five of these settlements were established in Eastern Sudan. Most continued to need external assistance due to the long distances from agricultural plots to villages, lack of potable water, and the seasonality of economic activity since there was no source of income to supplement that gained from agriculture during the off season.⁴⁰ Some settlements, however, were more successful, largely because the local

In Sudan, the settlements included wage-earning programs that provided “guest worker” status to refugees.

rural economies became dependent on the supply of cheap labor the refugees provided.⁴¹

In Uganda, where a settlement approach was tried in 1968 with self-sufficiency as the goal, the lack of success was due largely to a change in refugee development policy soon after the project began. This was because of a growing fear in the state development agency that a focus on rural settlements would result in “uneven development,” taking scarce resources away from other regions.⁴²

In Costa Rica, the Los Angeles settlement employed a medium- to large-enterprise strategy in creating employment for displaced Salvadorans. This program ultimately failed for a

variety of reasons, including the fact that the camp was far from population centers, and thus markets for the goods it produced; because it suffered poor management; and because adequate feasibility appraisals were not conducted in advance.⁴³ Rural cooperatives in Nicaragua, on the other hand, were much more successful, where the refugees were inserted into a local labor market facing a shortage of workers.

In Belize and Panama, large and medium-sized rural enterprises that were developed in refugee hosting areas had a number of elements that would have seemed to position them for success, but cultural differences between host and refugee populations ultimately prevented the refugees from achieving economic integration and self-sufficiency.⁴⁴

Despite UNHCR’s apparent financial investment in and commitment to host country integration programs, which sought refugee self-sufficiency in the 1960s and 1970s, this effort was largely unsuccessful. Most organized settlements were unable to achieve or sustain economic self-sufficiency, and most refugees were not integrated into their host countries. According to Barry Stein, the most significant obstacles to their success have been “political factors involving the host country’s view of refugee settlements which impede the achievement of self-sufficiency, make it difficult to maintain if it is achieved, and which prevent the refugees’ political and social integration into the host country.”⁴⁵ Of the 117 settlements established in Africa between 1961 and 1979, 85 were still operating by 1982. Of those that were no longer operating, 21 were closed due to repatriation (with 7 being declared self-sufficient before being closed) and 11 were abandoned. Of the 85 still operating, 30 had been declared self-sufficient, 21 of which had received renewed aid, while 55 were not declared self-sufficient by 1982.⁴⁶

Development Assisted Integration (DAI)

Like the other local integration schemes mentioned above, DAI is an approach which attempts to find an interim solution for refugees in protracted situations that utilizes refugees' economic potential to enable them to become self-sufficient while also benefiting the host country. Refugees in DAI arrangements could end up becoming permanent members of the host society, either by official normalization of their status or through de facto integration; or they could eventually return to their country of origin. The difference, however, is that DAI approaches neither confine refugees to camp-like settlements in which they are separated from the local population, nor does it envision allowing refugees to settle anywhere they choose without regulation, as in the case of self-settlement. Unlike zonal development, DAI approaches do not create parallel systems but instead strengthen existing services, improving them for both refugees and locals.

Many different kinds of local integration projects could be considered DAI approaches, from refugee self-reliance schemes to zones of residence. However, they must all include a high degree of freedom of movement, the ability to settle amongst the local population, access to income generating opportunities, and the support of local services and infrastructure. Essentially, the DAI model takes the most successful elements of previous local integration models and combines them, while allowing a great deal of flexibility to adapt the approach to the local context and to the interests of the various parties in a given country.

One example of a DAI approach is the Zambia Initiative, which has operated in Zambia since 2002. The project is government-led and UNHCR-supported with UNDP serving as the lead agency. Its objective is to integrate the interests of refugees into long term national development plans that benefit both locals and refugees.⁴⁷

Historically, the Zambian government has been a welcoming host for refugees. When Angolans began arriving in 1966, the government pursued a policy of settlements instead of camps, allowing refugee households to have land for cultivation, but expecting them to produce their own food. A small number of well-educated refugees were even allowed to reside in the urban areas.⁴⁸ However, by 1998 most of the refugees had not returned to Angola, and indeed more were arriving.

Consequently, the Zambian government, in concert with UNHCR and donors, designed the Zambia Initiative. Begun in 2000, its goal was to utilize the refugees as agents of development and grant them rights they did not have during their decades of settlement residence. The Zambian government called the project, "a development through local integration project that promotes a holistic approach in addressing the needs of refugee holding areas."⁴⁹ While the project got off to a promising start, political events in Angola in 2002 made repatriation more likely than it had been in decades and undercut the project when many refugees left Zambia to return home. Nonetheless, after two years, the project supported agricultural credit, animal husbandry, construction, and infrastructure development. While it remains too soon

*The program cost
an estimated \$4 per
refugee annually
compared with \$50 for
camp-based medical
programs.*

for a definitive evaluation, the Zambia Initiative could be a model for future DAI endeavors, particularly since it involved a rare instance of successful coordination between UNHCR and UNDP.⁵⁰

Another example of a successful DAI approach is found in Guinea's policy toward refugees from Liberia and Sierra Leone. These refugees were allowed to settle in local villages and given access to existing local welfare services, which were reinforced as part of international relief programs. According to Barbara Harrell-Bond, this approach provided benefits to the local and refugee populations at a fraction of what it would have cost to run the requisite number of camps for those refugees. The

Central to a DAI approach is the idea that refugees have the right to work and that they and the communities that surround them can be better off when they do so.

program cost an estimated \$4 per refugee annually compared with \$50 for camp-based medical programs.⁵¹

Central to a DAI approach is the idea that refugees have the right to work and that they and the communities that surround them can be better off when they do so. However, most African countries do not have enough urban areas or livelihood opportunities to absorb and employ all the refugees that are living within their borders for an indefinite period of time.⁵² For this reason, an element to a DAI approach in some countries could be the creation of projects promoting services to benefit the entire community, which could also train refugees and locals in specific skills. In Port Sudan, for example, numerous projects were established to train, provide services to, and offer

credit to Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees and local Sudanese alike.⁵³

The Ugandan self-reliance strategy is another example of a DAI approach, one that is quite instructive in terms of the shifts actors need to make for this kind of approach to be politically feasible. In this case, UNHCR and the Ugandan government recognized that promoting self-reliance and integrating refugee assistance into national systems of service delivery would require a change of attitude on the part of all stakeholders involved. They concluded that UNHCR and the NGOs would need to move away from a relief-centered paradigm and the utilization of parallel service systems, while the host government needed to implement legislation allowing refugees greater freedom of movement and ability to work while advocating actively for the self-reliance strategy. At the same time, they maintained that refugees would need to give up unrealistic expectations for continuous external support, while donors and development organizations would need to put integrated refugee programs on their agendas.⁵⁴

Development Assisted Integration – Is it Viable?

Obstacles and Challenges: A Stakeholder Analysis

As shown by the often unsuccessful results of DAI approaches in the past, it is clear that there are a number of practical challenges to making this kind of approach work

on the ground. In addition to these micro-level difficulties, there are also significant challenges to the broader paradigm shift which it entails. A closer look at the obstacles and disincentives, perceived and real, that each key stakeholder faces (the local population, host governments, UNHCR, refugees, donor countries, and agencies), is necessary to better understand what steps would need to be taken to convince the various actors that a paradigm shift would be in their interest.

Locals might resist a DAI approach out of an often justified fear of competition in the labor market, downward pressure on the low end of the wage scale, ecological damage, or competition for other scarce resources such as arable land and firewood. Additionally, ethnic, cultural, religious, and language differences with the host population may make it difficult to integrate a refugee population and can elicit hostility or fear from the local population Especially after the bloody conflicts of the 1990s, locals were often concerned that refugees not confined to camps, threaten the security of their community.

Host governments can be hostile to the DAI approach for a number of reasons. As with locals, security is a key concern, as are the health and the environmental impacts of integrating refugees amongst locals. Because host governments can be highly invested in maintaining the large bureaucracies that deliver these services, any model that entails doing away with parallel services or failing to utilize existing parallel service delivery systems risks facing resistance. For example, most host governments have separate departments for development and refugee affairs. This redundancy creates many jobs and entrenched interests that may resist improved inter-agency coordination.⁵⁵

Host governments are also concerned that they will lose aid if refugee camps are eliminated, as the vast majority of spending on refugees goes to the maintenance and care of camps.⁵⁶ From a host government's perspective, keeping refugees in camps makes them less likely to compete with locals for employment, become politically active in their home country conflicts by settling near the border in sparsely populated areas, and more likely to return home once the conflict ends.

UNHCR and other international NGOs providing assistance are also reluctant for a number of reasons to shift toward a DAI approach. First, a greater focus on development would move resources for refugee assistance into the development arena and away from refugee agencies. According to Karen Jacobsen, international aid agencies are reluctant to "shift aid delivery and implementation to local governments" often citing concerns about "corruption, lack of capacity and expertise, lack of neutrality and risk of ethnic/political favoritism on the part of local governments or agencies."⁵⁷ However, as Jacobsen points out, these same agencies are by no means

Locals might resist a DAI approach out of an often justified fear of competition in the labor market, downward pressure on the low end of the wage scale, ecological damage, or competition for other scarce resources such as arable land and firewood.

free of corruption, but are certainly interested in protecting their bureaucratic territory. It is also difficult to secure funding for local integration and development projects. Since there is little data to prove that these are economically viable alternatives, it is hard to quantify exactly how much is spent and who benefits from this kind of approach. It is also a concern that, if development and refugee aid are blended and parallel services are merged, host governments will neglect the needs of refugees in meeting those of their own citizens. This is of particular concern in democracies, where government is held more directly accountable to citizens.

There are also a great many obstacles to linking refugee and development aid. Despite the unnecessary costs of involving more than one UN agency in a DAI project, duplicating efforts such as assessment missions, fundraising, negotiations with governments, registration and distribution, and transportation arrangements⁵⁸, coordinating refugee and development aid in protracted situations presents a significant challenge. Historically, such projects have

Historically, such projects have been an area of overlap between the mandates of UNHCR and UNDP, leaving it unclear which organization should aggressively advocate for such programs.

been an area of overlap between the mandates of UNHCR and UNDP, leaving it unclear which organization should aggressively advocate for such programs. The result has been that projects merging refugee assistance and development have often suffered from low visibility.

Refugee and development aid are also administered very differently in the UN system. While refugee flows are viewed as temporary and necessitate an initial emergency response, UNDP funding and budget allocation operates on five year indicative planning cycles. In contrast, the UNHCR's planning cycle is closely tied to its annual budget, which changes each year in response to new refugee situations.⁵⁹ In the Consolidated Appeal Process, the various UN agencies agree on funding requests for each country in which they work. These requests are then taken to the donors, which decide how much of their own aid budgets

to allocate for each listed country. Consequently, UN funding depends greatly on the perceptions of donor countries and agencies as to which countries and problems are most important.

Nonetheless, there are cases in which these obstacles to inter-agency coordination have been overcome and UNHCR and UNDP have worked well together to tackle refugee-related development projects. In Southern Sudan, for example, the two agencies worked together to promote mutual cooperation in funding and implementing aerial surveys for a land distribution program, and for water and land development schemes in heavily refugee-impacted areas. However, political instability in the region interrupted these projects and this model UNHCR-UNDP collaboration. Other examples of highly successful refugee-development coordination include projects in Somalia, Kenya, Uganda, DRC, and Zambia.⁶⁰

Donor governments and agencies are usually most satisfied with efforts that

produce immediate results, such as the construction of refugee camps or the provision of food aid. Such actions are not only highly visible and personally fulfilling, but they are also easy to publicize in order to facilitate continued funding of such efforts. Local integration, on the other hand, has the effect of making refugees less visible, making it both psychologically unsatisfying to those who, in the most basic sense, wish to help, and harder to garner funding for efforts which have this end as their goal.

With respect to the interests of refugees, it is important to remember that, regardless of the seemingly intractable nature of the conflict that has displaced them, most hold close the idea that they will eventually return home. For that reason, local integration schemes can be hard to sell to refugees reluctant to put down roots or entertain the idea that they will not be returning to their country of origin. Staying in camps allows refugees, host states, and donors to continue to think of the displacement as temporary. Also, refugees face short-term incentives to stay in camps, such as the availability of basic necessities and services and perceived (or real) access to third-country resettlement and organized repatriation.

... regardless of the seemingly intractable nature of the conflict that has displaced them, most hold close the idea that they will eventually return home.

Optimal Preconditions: Recommendations for DAI Implementation

Having examined the results of various DAI initiatives, this paper will highlight what has emerged from this survey as the most important preconditions for successfully implementing a DAI approach. First, host country policies must be designed to allow refugees the right to freedom of movement and right to work. This is essential if refugees are to support themselves and their families without high levels of continued aid. In countries, including Cote d'Ivoire during the 1990s, where such rights have been respected, refugees have been relatively economically successful while benefiting their host countries.⁶¹ In countries where policies are still prohibitively restrictive, authorities' willingness to allow refugees to circumvent these rules has been a mitigating factor.⁶²

Another crucial factor is the availability of inputs, especially for rural integration efforts where arable land is essential. For example, Djibouti, Somalia, and Algeria have a great deal of unused land, but the land is not suitable for farming.⁶³ The desert area of Chad, which currently plays host to Sudanese refugees, is an example of an environment in which camps are the only appropriate way to host refugees. The land there is far from arable and there is no local population or economic centers into which to integrate. Tanzania, Zambia, and Mozambique, on the other hand, have quality, arable land that is not being used by locals, recommending them as suitable for refugee integration projects. Education, training, and capital are other inputs whose availability make success with such an approach more likely.

The development of DAI projects requires external and host country support, and depends, of course, on the cooperation of the refugees themselves.⁶⁴ In addition,

the local population must be willing to participate in the project and engage with the refugees economically. Not surprisingly, shared language, culture, and ethnic origin between the two groups make it more likely that the local population will be predisposed to welcome a refugee population.⁶⁵ Whether or not these similarities are present, the likelihood of host community support is increased by including them in the integration effort from its earliest stages. With Sudanese refugees in Congo in 1971, Guinea-Bissauan refugees in Senegal, Angolans in Zambia in 1972, and Eritreans in Sudan, the inclusion of poor locals has been the key to successful integration.⁶⁶ To encourage and reward cooperation from both groups, UNHCR and its NGO partners must work to create jobs for locals and refugees alike.

Similarly, the needs of the host country and the local population, as well as the refugees, must be considered, and the nature of the integration scheme must be customized to fit the particular exigencies of the local situation. In practice, this goes beyond offering the same goods and services to locals as are offered to refugees; and extends to providing locals access to the same income generation activities, micro credit loans, and vocational training offered to

With Sudanese refugees in Congo in 1971, Guinea-Bissauan refugees in Senegal, Angolans in Zambia in 1972, and Eritreans in Sudan, the inclusion of poor locals has been the key to successful integration.

refugees. Strengthening the infrastructure of the host country and refugee-hosting region can provide lasting benefits to refugees and locals alike, while also enabling a country to better handle future refugee emergencies.⁶⁷ Specifically, building roads, strengthening public transportation systems, and developing the agricultural and essential service sectors benefit the host country while helping refugees integrate. Meanwhile, the local population feels it is benefiting from the presence of refugees, while the improvements to infrastructure boost the host country's overall development profile.

Success in local integration is much more likely if refugees are gradually integrated into the local economy.⁶⁸ According to UNHCR, the DAI approach is most appropriate where refugees are already integrating locally and are not likely to repatriate in the near future.⁶⁹ Even inside camps, the availability of certain benefits, such as food and non-food aid, income generation activities and inputs, access to credit, and jobs provided by international agencies, increase the likelihood that refugees will be able to participate in economic activities that may then enable them to integrate locally into the surrounding community.⁷⁰ Regardless of the speed of economic integration, however, there must be demand in the local economy for the refugees' labor, the goods they produce, or the services they provide. While government encampment policies are often based on minimizing competition for jobs between refugees and locals, evidence is building that the positive economic contribution made by refugees in the form of economic stimulus and humanitarian assistance can often outweigh the problem of increased competition.⁷¹

In addition, any successful DAI effort must have a labor insertion strategy at

its core, whether it be individual salaried employment, as with skilled refugees in Central America; self-employment, such as through micro enterprise programs; a medium to large enterprise strategy, as with refugee settlements such as the Los Angeles settlement in Costa Rica; or rural cooperatives.

It is also essential that the employment strategy is tailored to a particular host country and refugee context, since different income generating activities work better in different contexts. Micro enterprise often does not result in self-sufficiency, especially in environments with highly competitive markets, low incomes, and large and growing informal sectors. In a tribal context, such as in some settlements in Pakistan or Sudan, micro enterprise is far more likely to be successful than in some areas in urban Latin America or Asia, where highly complex informal markets already flourish.⁷² In rural settlement schemes, large and medium sized enterprises are often the most suitable kind of employment generating initiatives, especially in areas where there is little economic activity or demand for additional labor. Such enterprises are large enough to allow feasibility studies, which reduce risk and permit estimations of productivity and identification of market channels. They are also better positioned to compete in foreign markets, as opposed to local, markets, thus generating less resistance from the local community and the host government than micro enterprise projects. At the same time, such initiatives are large enough to create jobs for locals as well as refugees, and thus facilitate social integration. However, enterprises of this size should only be attempted in the most favorable of contexts. In less hospitable environments, small projects can be more convenient, as they take less planning, are less visible, and do not require a complex assistance structure or government support.⁷³

It is easy to underestimate the importance of the planning stage in facilitating local integration. This phase should include creating channels for refugees to articulate their needs;⁷⁴ and research on soil quality, health risks, climactic conditions, and property rights to ensure proper site selection. Water, capital, planning and administration skills, along with a way to diversify production activities, are essential to integrating refugees in a manner that contributes to the economic development of the host region.⁷⁵ Since it is difficult to predict which refugee situation will become protracted, planning for this possibility must be done from the outset of any refugee operation. It is considerably harder to come up with a practical, cost-effective plan once host government resentments and refugee grievances over rations have taken hold. For this reason, it is advisable from the outset to establish particulars on the level and timeline of compensation to the host government for the refugee burden; the duration of aid distribution and income generation programs (assuming a protracted situation); and whether there is a need to create specialized services in addition to strengthening those already in place.⁷⁶

***In a tribal context,
such as in some
settlements in Pakistan
or Sudan, micro
enterprise is far more
likely to be successful
than in some areas in
urban Latin America
or Asia.***

Conclusion

A review of the academic literature and DAI approaches in practice leads this author to the conclusion that, where preconditions favoring successful implementation exist, an influx of refugees can evolve from a burden to a benefit for the host country in the medium to long term. These favorable preconditions exist when five key factors are present: 1) the refugee's right to freedom of movement and right to work are respected by the host government to some degree, 2) the necessary inputs are available for the kind of economic activity in which the refugees will be engaged (such as arable land or job training), 3) the host government supports and is committed to the effort, 4) locals benefit as well as refugees, and 5) there is a place for the refugees in the local economy. While other aforementioned preconditions make successful DAI implementation more likely, the presence of these five indicate a situation in which a DAI approach would be viable. In those cases, the DAI approach should be advocated and then tested.

Under favorable conditions, an influx of refugees can evolve from a burden to a benefit for the host country in the medium to long term.

Endnotes

- 1 US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, "World Refugee Survey 2006," <http://www.refugees.org/article.aspx?id=1614>.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 UNHCR, "Handbook on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status, 1979," www.unhcr.ch/refworld/legal/handbook/handeng/hbtoc.htm.
- 4 UNHCR, "Global Refugee Trends, 2005," www.unhcr.org/statistics/STATISTICS/4486ceb12.pdf.
- 5 US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, "World Refugee Survey 2006."
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, "World Refugee Survey 2005," www.refugees.org/article.aspx?id=1614.
- 8 Gaim Kibreab, *African Refugees: Reflections on the African Refugee Problem*, (Africa World Press, 1985), 469.
- 9 Karen Jacobsen, "The Forgotten Solution: Local Integration for Refugees in Developing Countries," *UNHCR New Issues in Refugee Research*, Working Paper No. 45 (2001).
- 10 Refugees International, "Kakuma: A Troubled Refugee Camp in Kenya," www.refugeesinternational.org/content/article/detail/910/?PHPSESSID=5ce00f92779c166324e1d.
- 11 UNHCR, "The State of the World's Refugees: Human Displacement in the New Millennium," www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/publ/openssl.htm?tbl=PUBL&id=4444d3bf4.
- 12 U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, "World Refugee Survey 2006."
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Karen Jacobsen, *The Economic Life of Refugees*, (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2005), 8-9
- 15 Ernst E. Boesch and Armin M.F. Goldschmidt, Eds., *Refugees and Development*, (Schriftenreihe der Deutschen Stiftung für internationale Entwicklung, 1983), 23.
- 16 Barbara Harrell-Bond, "What Are Refugee Camps Good For? The Plight of Refugees in sub-Saharan Africa," *UNHCR New Issues in Refugee Research*, Working Paper No. 29 (2000).
- 17 Gaim Kibreab, 95.

- 18 Guglielmo Verdirame and Barbara Harrell-Bond, *Rights in Exile: Janus-Faced Humanitarianism* (Berghahn Books, 2005).
- 19 Karen Jacobsen, *The Economic Life of Refugees*.
- 20 Ibid., Ch 2.
- 21 Robert F. Gorman, Ed., *Refugee Aid and Development: Theory and Practice* (Greenwood Press, 1993), Ch 1.
- 22 Gaim Kibreab, 110.
- 23 T.F. Betts in Robert F. Gorman, Ed., *Refugee Aid and Development: Theory and Practice* (Greenwood Press, 1993), 8.
- 24 Ibid., 14.
- 25 Gaim Kibreab, 110.
- 26 T.F. Betts in Gaim Kibreab, *African Refugees: Reflections on the African Refugee Problem* (Africa World Press, 1985), 111.
- 27 Nathaniel H. Goetz, "Towards Self Sufficiency and Integration: An Historical Evaluation of Assistance Programmes for Rwandese Refugees in Burundi, 1962 – 1965," *UNHCR New Issues in Refugee Research*, Working Paper No. 87, March 2003.
- 28 T.F. Betts, 18.
- 29 Robert F. Gorman, Ed., 143.
- 30 Gaim Kibreab, 87.
- 31 Ibid., 103.
- 32 B. E. Harrell-Bond, *Imposing Aid: Emergency Assistance to Refugees* (Oxford University Press, 1986), 8.
- 33 Elizabeth G. Ferris, *Refugees and World Politics*, (Praeger Publishers, 1985), 173.
- 34 Ernst E. Boesch and Armin M.F. Goldschmidt, Eds., 42..
- 35 Robert F. Gorman, Ed., 143.
- 36 Ernst E. Boesch and Armin M.F. Goldschmidt, Eds., 40. For a comparison of spending on basic necessities in camps vs. in Tanzania's organized settlements, see Boesch and Goldschmidt, 1983, 40-41.
- 37 Howard Adelman and John Sorenson, Eds., *African Refugees: Development Aid and Repatriation* (Westview Press, 1994), 135.
- 38 Ernst E. Boesch and Armin M.F. Goldschmidt, Eds. 86.
- 39 Gaim Kibreab, 111.
- 40 Ernst E. Boesch and Armin M.F. Goldschmidt, Eds. 83.
- 41 John R. Rogge, *Refugees: A Third World Dilemma* (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1987), 86.
- 42 Gaim Kibreab, 111.
- 43 Lelio Mármora, *International Migration Policies and Programmes* (United Nations and the International Organization for Migration, 1999), 225.
- 44 Ibid., 226.
- 45 Barry Stein, "Older Refugee Settlements in Africa" (paper presented at the 1990 meeting of the American Anthropological Association, New Orleans, 28 November 1990), www.msu.edu/course/pls/461/stein/FINAL.htm.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 "The Zambia Initiative," *UNHCR Project Report Series*, UNHCR (2004).
- 48 Karen Jacobsen, *The Economic Life of Refugees*, 100.
- 49 Ibid., 101.
- 50 Ibid., 102.
- 51 Barbara Harrell-Bond, "What Are Refugee Camps Good For?"
- 52 Boesch and Goldschmidt, Eds., 41.
- 53 Eve Hall, "The Port Sudan Small Enterprise Program," *Seeds* No. 11 ISSN 073-6833, www.popcouncil.org/pdfs/seeds/seeds11.pdf.
- 54 Karen Jacobsen, *The Economic Life of Refugees*, 75.
- 55 Ibid., 99.
- 56 Ibid.
- 57 Ibid.

- 58 Gil Loescher, *The UNHCR and World Politics: A Perilous Path* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 355.
- 59 Robert F. Gorman, Ed.,
- 60 Robert F. Gorman, *Coping With Africa's Refugee Burden: A Time for Solutions* (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987), Ch 3.
- 61 Karen Jacobsen, *The Economic Life of Refugees*, 69.
- 62 *Ibid.*, 32.
- 63 John R. Rogge in Elizabeth G. Ferris, *Refugees and World Politics* (Praeger Publishers, 1985), Ch. 9.
- 64 Ernst E. Boesch and Armin M.F. Goldschmidt, Eds., 40.
- 65 Karen Jacobsen, *The Economic Life of Refugees*, 107.
- 66 Gaim Kibreab, 95.
- 67 Gil Loescher, *Beyond Charity: International Cooperation and the Global Refugee Crisis* (Oxford University Press, 1993), 174.
- 68 *Ibid.*, Ch 1.
- 69 UNHCR, *2003 Statistical Yearbook: Trends in Displacement, Protection, and Solutions* (UNHCR, 2003).
- 70 Karen Jacobsen, *The Economic Life of Refugees*, Ch 2.
- 71 *Ibid.*, 70.
- 72 Lelio Mármora, *International Migration Policies and Programmes* (United Nations and the International Organization for Migration, 1999), 225.
- 73 *Ibid.*, 226.
- 74 T.F. Betts in Robert F. Gorman, Ed., *Refugee Aid and Development: Theory and Practice* (Greenwood Press, 1993), Ch 2.
- 75 Ernst E. Boesch and Armin M.F. Goldschmidt, Eds., 83.
- 76 Karen Jacobsen, *The Economic Life of Refugees*, 106-7.