

# RURAL REFUGEES IN AFRICA: WHAT THE EYE DOES NOT SEE

Robert Chambers  
Institute of Development Studies  
University of Sussex  
Brighton, BN1 9RE,  
U.K.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper considers the way in which rural refugees who become self-settled are perceived and the relative disadvantages of this group when compared to urban refugees. Areas for further research and action to enable rural refugees to settle more rapidly and easily are suggested.

## DEFINITIONS

'Urban refugees' refers to those in urban areas and 'rural refugees' to those in rural areas. Although the latter may have originated in urban areas (and *vice versa*), the greater majority of rural refugees are from rural areas. These populations can be divided into those who live in organized settlements or camps and those who, with or without external assistance, settle themselves.

## NUMBERS AND TYPES OF REFUGEES

Estimates of numbers matter. If individual human beings are of equal importance, more refugees matter more than fewer refugees. To make such a simple point would be insulting were it not habitually ignored. It is easier to grasp and think about the problems of one refugee than of a group; or about a few hundred refugees than about half a million.

It is difficult to estimate even orders of magnitude for the numbers of refugees in Africa. There are many sources of inaccuracy. Some government estimates exaggerate numbers through double counting, or to obtain additional relief supplies, or to score political points off a neighbouring state from which refugees originate. Other estimates undercount, especially where refugees try to remain unidentified, or where host countries do not wish to annoy their neighbours by admitting that there are any refugees at all. The greatest uncertainty concerns refugees, sometimes estimated as high as one million, from Guinea in Senegal, Ivory Coast and elsewhere in West Africa, and who usually do not appear in lists of refugees but who seem to be included in totals for the continent. Other difficulties include knowing how to separate economic or educational migrants from those who would

qualify as refugees in the strict legal sense; when refugees of long residence should cease to be counted; whether, and if so for how long, to include refugees who have repatriated; and whether to include displaced persons who are within their countries of origin. Moreover, the numbers of refugees in Africa change constantly with new influxes and repatriations.

Two sets of figures can be distinguished: first, totals of estimates for known and recognized refugee situations; and second vaguer totals for the continent as a whole. The gap between these is considerable and appears to be widening. Thus adding the totals on a map published by UNHCR in Spring 1979 (UNHCR, 1979a) gives 2,140,000 refugees (see Table 1.); but the figure cited by the OAU Secretary-General in an interview published at about the same time was the more usual 4 million (UNHCR, 1979b, p. 4) presumably including the unrecognized Guineans, the Zaireans and

Table 1. Numbers of refugees in Africa, February 1979\*

Algeria	52,000
Angola	180,000
Botswana	19,000
Burundi	50,000
Djibouti (Republic of)	20,000
Ethiopia	11,000
Gabon	60,000
Kenya	6,000
Morocco	500
Mozambique	100,000
Rwanda	7,500
Senegal	5,000
Somalia	500,000
Sudan	250,000
Tanzania	167,000
Uganda	112,000
Zaire	530,000
Zambia	70,000
	2,140,000

\*Source: UNHCR 1979a, pp. 6-7, which qualifies these statistics as follows:

"UNHCR does not have complete statistics on refugees and displaced persons in the world and uses those provided to UNHCR by governments. The figures which follow concern only refugees in countries where they number at least 500 and where their situation has been brought to the attention of UNHCR."

Angolans who have repatriated and who are in the process of resettling, and many others who are officially unacknowledged.

The relative numbers of refugees in different categories are similarly uncertain. An estimate made by the writer in 1976, omitting refugees from Guinea, is given in Table 2.

With refugees from Guinea, the continental total might have been about 2 million. Since 1976 these proportions have changed. The proportion of urban refugees, while still very small, has risen: one estimate in early 1979 was that they were about 90,000 or 4% of refugees recognized at that time. The proportion and absolute numbers of self-settling refugees is much harder to estimate. If refugees repatriating from Zaire to Angola and from Angola to Zaire, and also refugees from Guinea, were excluded, the figure might be under 1 million. If, on the other hand, they are included, it might be over 2 million. A resolution of the Pan-African Conference on Refugees held at Arusha in May 1979 recognized that "at present more than 60% of Africa's rural refugees live outside organized settlement schemes." But the fact that it is difficult to say to within 1 million what that total should be is a first, and dramatic, indication of ignorance about self-settling refugees.

#### WHY THE EYE DOES NOT SEE

There are systemic reasons for ignorance about rural refugees generally and about self-settling refugees in particular. Together they interlock to sustain that ignorance. Some apply to ignorance of rural poverty generally on the part of urban-based professionals. Others are more specific to rural refugees. They include:

- urban and elite biases;
- project bias;
- dry season bias;

- political and diplomatic factors;
- remoteness;
- low profile;
- political impotence.

Let us consider them in turn.

#### *Urban and elite biases*

Urban and elite biases are reflected in writing about refugees. The plight of educated urban refugees, a tiny minority, are often reported and urban counselling services described. Visitors of Africa studying refugee problems go to urban centres first and may sometimes never leave them. Christian Potholm (1976), writing on "Africa's Persistent Problem" following "an extensive field trip dealing with refugee resettlement in East and Southern Africa", after passing mention of rural settlements, deals primarily with urban refugees citing individual cases in Mombasa, Lusaka, Gaborone, Kampala, Francistown, Addis Ababa, Mbabane and Nairobi, and concluding that "the single most overlooked feature of the present refugee situation in Africa is the mental health of the individual refugee". These biases are less marked in the Christian Aid special report on *Refugees: Africa's Challenge* (Knight, 1978). Other observers (e.g. Enahoro, 1976) have taken a more balanced view, or have drawn attention to large neglected groups of self-settling refugees (e.g. Brittain, 1976b); but they have been the exception rather than the rule. Quick interviews, quick insights and quick stories can be obtained more efficiently, congenially and safely in urban centres than in remote rural areas.

Pronounced urban and elite bias is also found in work with refugees. Lawyers and social workers predominate. These are the professions appropriate for dealing with individual cases like European refugees from Eastern Europe; they are, too, professions which can be recruited in the indus-

Table 2. Numbers of refugees in Africa (1976)

	Receiving assistance	Not receiving assistance	Total	Percentage
Urban refugees	4,000	10,000	14,000	1.2
Rural refugees in organized settlements and camps	170,000	110,000*	280,000	24
Self-settled rural refugees, not in organized settlements or camps	520,000†	350,000	870,000	75
Totals	694,000	470,000	1,164,000	100

\* But formerly assisted.

† Of these, some 480,000 were Angolans from Zaire, some of whom were receiving some marginal assistance. The total volume of assistance to this category was small compared with the volume to the others.

trialized countries. Well-intentioned governments and international and voluntary agencies provide scholarships and assist further education. This requires urban staff and urban work. Moreover, urban refugees, often educated, articulate and politically active, demand attention and usually receive it: they queue for interviews daily, they protest, they do not go away. Understaffed as they are, UNHCR branch offices in Africa have to handle rural as well as urban problems; but the urban are immediate and take priority. Pressing demands trap staff in capital cities. To find time for rural visits is difficult. In any case, rural visits make yet more work. A prudent staff member may sense that zeal in uncovering new problems may not be greeted with unequivocal acclaim in the head office. A policy of "let sleeping dogs lie" is bound to be tempting for field staff in understaffed and overloaded agencies. Urban refugees come first; rural refugees remain a residual problem.

#### *Project bias*

Project bias has been marked in research and writing on rural refugees. The literature on settlement schemes in tropical Africa is disproportionate to their importance. And a similar bias is found in work on organized refugee settlement compared with self-settlement. Several studies have analyzed the experience with organized settlement (e.g. Yeld, 1965, 1968; Merusi, 1967; van der Meeren, 1969; Gosselin, 1970; Chambers *et al.*, 1971; Feldman, 1971; Morsink, 1971; Trappe, 1971; Sokiri, 1972; Potten, 1976). Such settlements have been visible, identifiable, accessible, organized as sources of data and statistics, and often provided with convenient accommodation for those undertaking research; agencies, too, have sometimes sponsored work. In comparison, self-settling refugees, although more numerous, have been neglected. Internal reports of agencies on self-settling refugees have not become part of common knowledge. The account of Grenfell (1967) of the work of the Kibentele Baptist Mission in Bas Zaire with Angolan refugees stands alone, to the best of my knowledge, as an account of relief work with mass influxes of self-settling refugees which has found its way into print. Again, to the best of my knowledge, the only available account by a social scientist of the problems and strategies of unassisted self-settling refugees is that of Art Hansen\* (1979a, 1979b) on Angolans in Zambia.

The rural visits of officials have a similar project bias. There are exceptions, especially with investigations of fresh influxes, or where self-settling refugees are assisted. But organized camps and settlements receive the lion's share of the attention. They constitute known and accepted concentrations of refugees; and per capita expenditures in organized settlements are far higher than for self-settling refugees. The average allocations of UNHCR for 1976 were 40 times higher per head, at \$20, for refugees in organized settlements than for

that minority of self-settling refugees towards whom some assistance was directed,<sup>†</sup> and official visitors tend to go on supervisory visits to where most money is being spent. On organized settlements, there is also usually somewhere for the urban visitor to spend the night without undue discomfort and some source of not too unfamiliar food. Physical works in the form of roads, and buildings for headquarters, schools and clinics also make an intelligible point of contact for visitors unfamiliar with rural Africa. They can be inspected as evidence of achievement and as a diversion from dealing with individual cases and complaints. There is a building bias. In the words of some refugees, describing rare visitors "They only talk to the buildings" and "They come, and they sign the book, and they go".

#### *Dry season bias*

Dry season bias in rural visits distorts perceptions in another way. Poor people dependent on agriculture in tropical countries, are vulnerable to seasonal deprivation, especially during the rains and before harvest: at that time food is short and costly; the need to work on cultivation and weeding is high; morbidity, especially the diarrhoeas, malaria, Guinea worm disease and skin infections, tend to peak; and malnutrition is most marked (Chambers *et al.*, 1979). Self-settling refugees are especially vulnerable. Grenfell has described the crisis when the International Red Cross closed down their feeding programme in Bas Zaire before the refugees had a harvest. He also wrote:

"Not surprisingly, there has been much malnutrition amongst the refugees. For 3 years, during the annual peak period, December and January, there would be many deaths, especially amongst the children. The reason was that the normal diet during these months just before harvest was on a starvation level; these were the months when food was the shortest, especially nutritionally valuable foods such as peanuts. In December 1964, the large hospital at Kimpese reported that more than 50% of refugee patients died." (Grenfell, 1967, 1068-1069)

But the rains are precisely the time when urban-based officials are least able or willing to travel. It is in the drier conditions which follow harvest and when things are better, that most impressions of rural conditions are derived. The worst times for self-settling refugees are liable to go unobserved.

#### *Political and diplomatic factors*

Political and diplomatic factors sometimes have a bearing. Host governments may not wish to prejudice relations with a neighbouring country by recognizing a group of refugees from it. Or, if there is a war of liberation or a guerrilla war, an

<sup>†</sup> "Report on UNHCR Assistance Activities in 1974-75 and Voluntary Funds Programme and Budget for 1976", document A/AC.96/516, UNHCR.

\* Currently at University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611, U.S.A.

area where refugees are self-settling may be forbidden to outside visitors. UNHCR staff may be inhibited by fear of damaging their relations with the government from pressing to find out more about a group of refugees.

### *Remoteness*

Self-settling refugees are often in remote areas, inaccessible to those based in capital cities. Over the past decade, Angolans in Bas Zaire and in Zambia, Jehovah's Witnesses variously in Zambia, Tanzania and Malawi, Burundi in Tanzania, Eritreans in the Sudan, Sudanese in Gambela Awraja in Ethiopia, and most recently Ugandans in the South Sudan, are examples of large groups in border regions which are difficult to reach from the capital city of the host country.

### *Low profile*

Self-settling refugees often have a low profile. Art Hansen, starting his fieldwork in a border area of Zambia, did not at first know that there were any refugees there, although he subsequently estimated them as 25-35% of the population; he believed that they were afraid he would report them to the Government (Hansen, 1979a, b). Omari (1976, pp. 115-151), in his analysis of rural development in Kibondo District in the Kigoma Region of Tanzania, deals with migration but does not mention refugees at any stage. Yet his fieldwork was carried out in 1973; there was a major influx into the Kigoma Region from Burundi in 1972; Kibondo is in northern Kogoma bordering Burundi, a district in which one might expect many of the refugees to be concentrated; and an estimate in 1976 put the number of self-settling Burundi refugees in the region at 75,000. In such cases self-settling refugees in border areas may be unseen because they wish to keep out of sight, fearing harassment, repatriation, or being moved. Or it may be that, like poor people all over the world, they are unseen because they live in the remoter, less fertile areas further from the roads, do not come forward to meet visitors, and maintain a low profile to keep out of trouble.

### *Political impotence*

Self-settling refugees are usually politically impotent. Remote, unorganized, deprived of their more educated members who go off to towns, secondary schools and scholarships, they rarely establish contact with assistance agencies on their own initiative. They cannot bang on office doors, speak to reporters, obtain television coverage or present an embarrassing problem to the richer countries of the world. They are out of sight, out of hearing, and conveniently out of mind. The refugees from Czechoslovakia in 1968, from Chile after 1973 and from Vietnam in 1979 have been blazoned across the headlines of the world's press; and many have been accepted into the industrialized countries as individual cases which receive close personal assistance. But Guineans in Senegal and

Ivory Coast, Equatorial Guineans in Gabon and Cameroun, Angolans in Zaire, Zaireans in Angola and Ugandans in the South Sudan have not moved the conscience of the rich world in the same way. Dying in rural Africa is less dramatic than drowning in the South China sea.

## MYTHS ABOUT SETTLEMENT

The combined effects of these biases and factors have been not merely ignorance but also its companion, myth. Concerning refugee settlement two myths are liable to mislead. Both have enough substance to justify them in some cases; but for different reasons they appeal to observers who then apply them across the board to situations where they are not true. Moreover, both are less true at the end of the 1970's than they were 10 years earlier. They are first, concerning organized settlement, the myth of the "total institution", and second, concerning self-settlement, the myth of "spontaneous integration".

### *Total institutions*

The idea of the total institution appeals to social scientists who have generally taken a negative view of organized settlement. This has some of its roots in research in East Africa in the latter 1960's when many agricultural settlement schemes were having teething troubles; mistakes had been made and social scientists duly observed them and wrote about them. Researchers concentrated on medium-sized settlements which were convenient to study, which had high staff to refugee or settler ratios, and where often one manager or commandant dominated. Along with prisons, boarding schools, hospitals and asylums, organized settlements could be seen as a new species in the genus "total institution", (Goffman, 1962; Moris, 1967; Gosselin, 1970; Sokiri, 1972). Now it is true that there were cases of abuse in organized refugee settlement through dictatorial management, restrictions on movement, petty corruption and bureaucratic harassment. It is also true that some refugees developed dependent attitudes and were reluctant to help themselves, as occurred with Rwandese at Mwese in Tanzania, one of the earliest refugee settlements. And wherever there were security problems so that a settlement had something of the character of a camp, as with Mozambiquan settlements in Southern Tanzania, the total institution analogy had some application. But many of the lessons of the 1960's, such as the value of giving families a high degree of autonomy on land from which they could provision themselves, had been learnt by the early 1970's and were incorporated in refugee settlements. The settlement successes of the 1970's such as Etsha in Botswana and Katumba and Ulyankulu in Tanzania were in no significant sense total institutions. In the case of the latter two, each with over 50,000 refugees, size and few staff would have ruled out a dictatorial regime even had one been sought.



Fig. 1.

The problems of these settlements were more economic\* than those of legal protection for refugees in a total institution. In sum, in the latter 1970's, although much remains to be desired, and rural refugees in organized settlements have been neglected compared with urban refugees, their management and situation have improved; and their side of a comparison with self-settlement would show up better than it would have done 10 years earlier.

#### *Spontaneous integration*

The idea of spontaneous integration appeals to officials engaged in refugee work who are faced with large numbers of dispersed and inaccessible refugees. In contrast with the pejorative 'total institution', 'spontaneous integration', as labels go, is benign. According to the Shorter Oxford Dictionary, 'spontaneous' means 'arising, proceeding, or acting entirely from natural impulse, without any external stimulus or constraint; voluntary;' and 'integration' means 'the making up of a whole by adding together or combining the separate

parts or elements; a making whole or entire'. The implications are reassuring. Refugees about whom little is known and for whom little or nothing is done, have been allowed to act from natural impulse, without external stimulus or constraint, to make up a whole with the local population.

The view of self-settlement implied in 'spontaneous integration' runs as follows. Self-settling refugees cross borders and resettle with ethnic kin. They are welcomed, fed and cared for as part of traditional hospitality. They are given land to cultivate. They quickly re-establish themselves. They are much better off than those rural refugees who are rounded up and herded off to camps and settlements.

To be sure, there have been cases which have looked like this. Cato Aall described how refugees from Mozambique entering Zambia in 1965 intended to stay with their relatives and friends, were not regarded as aliens but as unfortunate fellow men, and had good relations with the local population who were of the same tribe (Aall, 1967, pp. 29-32). William Zartman wrote of refugees from Guinea-Bissau in Senegal, that the host population:

"speak the same language, lead the same communal life, and sometimes even have shared the same fields which lay across the border. The affinity between the inhabitants and the refugees has proved so strong that, in many cases, the local population has shared everything with the refugees including lodging, tools, seeds, and food stocks"

(Zartman, 1970, p. 151).

\* Ulyankulu had to be divided up and part of the population resettled. Etsha took some time to achieve adequate incomes. Five years after their settlement, the Hambukushu refugees at Etsha still had average incomes less than one half of the next poorest rural group surveyed, who were employees of freehold farmers, and only a little over one third of the average for all rural households (Republic of Botswana, 1976). But this may reflect the very low base from which they started, and the history of the settlement has been one of growing prosperity (Potten, 1976).

Rachel Yeld, after describing some of the problems with organized settlements for Rwandese refugees in Tanzania, went on to contrast them with those:

“refugees who did not pass through one of the main centres but who established themselves as individual families or in small groups among the local population. Without receiving any official government assistance, they were in many cases able, by cultivating for food or money for the local people, to become self-sufficient within one season on land acquired through local custom.” (Yeld, 1965).

One may wonder however about the detail and the reality. Refugee populations are not homogenous. Some — those who manage to come with some assets, or who have strong ties of kinship with hosts, or who have strong families — may be a minority, albeit a visible minority, who do manage to establish themselves. Hansen (1979a, has pointed out that some could not. “Those refugees in camps are those who have failed to find kinsmen or who could not generate enough social and local political support”. But it is not just a question of the poorer and weaker refugees. Whole populations may suffer in ways which refute the myth. Neither moving a short distance, nor settling among ethnic kin, necessarily assures acceptable self-settlement: the Barundi refugees who crossed into South Kivu in 1972, fleeing from massacre, were to experience years of deprivation in an area already densely populated, although the distance they travelled was short; and the Bakongo refugees who crossed from Angola to Bas Zaire from 1961 onwards settled among ethnic kin but suffered badly.

This case of half a million Angolans in Bas Zaire shows how dangerous ignorance and myth can be. Miscalculations by relief agencies withdrawing support had severe effects (Grenfell, 1967). There were problems of perception on the official side. The High Commissioner for Refugees reported to his Executive Committee in 1969:

“An extensive mission undertaken in 1968 by the UNHCR representative in the Congo along the southwestern border of the country revealed that the condition of the refugees from Angola . . . is much less satisfactory than had been believed. He also discovered several smaller groups of Angolans whose existence had not been known to UNHCR until that time” (Holborn, 1975, p. 1059, citing Ex. Com., Sept. 1969, A/AC.96/414, Ann. I, 4-5).

A discernable deterioration was reported in living conditions in areas where refugees had been self-settled for several years. If more had been known, and known earlier, much more might have been done. The reassuring myth of “spontaneous integration” can always seem to dismiss the problem, and to suggest it would be better not to interfere. But problems, if they exist, are not solved by a choice of words.

#### THE REALITY OF SELF-SETTLEMENT

To write about the reality beneath the appearance of self-settlement is difficult because little detailed investigation is

known to have been reported. There is, of course, a danger of selective use of even what is known, and of the generation of new myths. An examination of evidence, does, however suggest 7 points, all deserving more detailed and widespread investigation, but all suggesting serious problems in self-settlement. They are:

- instant impoverishment;
- mixed reception;
- cheap labour, dear food;
- poor access to land;
- political and legal vulnerability;
- the first to suffer, the last to gain;
- costs to the poorer hosts.

#### *Instant impoverishment*

Most rural refugees arrive instantly impoverished. Their condition varies; but quietly skipping a few miles across a border to set up with help from relatives can only apply to a small minority of current refugees in Africa. More commonly there is traumatic flight, a loss of family (either dead, or left behind), exhaustion and shortage of food. Refugees lose land, livestock and possessions. If they have brought any cash savings with them, these are devalued or worthless. In the camp of Wad-el-Hileiwu in the Sudan, at one time in 1975 shortly after their arrival, refugees could get only 10 piastres for an Ethiopian dollar as against an official rate of 25, losing 60% of the value of their savings. In remote rural areas, in time of war, as in The Angola-Zambia case, the losses may be total. Hansen describes these:

“Refugees are poorer than normal migrants for several reasons. Angolan money is worthless outside the colony, so any monetary savings become worthless. Earlier immigrants from Angola would exchange their money at the border with people who traded in Angola, but the war stopped trade. The other mode of storing large amounts of capital is cattle. Earlier immigrants either sold their cattle before leaving or drove them to Zambia. Refugees either lost their cattle to various soldiers before leaving or abandoned their cattle. No-one was left to buy them, and it was dangerous to drive cattle because the Portuguese were bombing anyone they saw in the free fire zones. Only the refugees who fled in the first days of fighting were able to save some of their invested capital. Later refugees could only carry smaller less valuable items (clothes, blankets, tobacco, axe heads, etc.) By the time refugees reached their Zambian relatives, their food supplies were usually exhausted, as were the refugee themselves” (Hansen, 1979b).

What was true for Angolans fleeing from the Portuguese may be true for many others currently fleeing from oppression in Southern Africa.

One effect of this instant impoverishment and lack of assets is to aggravate the difficulties of becoming re-established.

Those who come with some capital have the best chance of being able to secure themselves with adequate livelihoods. Hansen (personal communication) has contrasted the advantages of a refugee family which at the outset could buy a field of cassava and thus not have to work for food, allowing them to devote themselves wholly to house-building and clearing their own fields, and a family which had to work for others from the start in order to get food to survive.

#### *Mixed reception*

The quality and duration of hospitality varies. Traditional hospitality has been an important factor in mitigating suffering. The welcome accorded to refugees and the sacrifices made for them can be impressive. In March 1975, before other relief arrived, the traders of Gedaref in the Sudan raised £7,000 to support the large influx of refugees from Eritrea. In 1976 the Sudan Government clerk at Jikao on the Ethiopian border was feeding Ethiopian refugees out of his meagre salary. Poor people are often the most generous and the greatest sacrifices for refugees may have been made by those who have least themselves. But there is another side to the coin. At an anecdotal level, one hears about refugees robbed by officials and other thieves. Angolans were robbed on returning from Zaire. Theft was reportedly common among South Sudanese Nuer who had moved into the Gambela area of Ethiopia in 1975, although they were among fellow Nuer. One detailed account comes from Colin Turnbull (1973, p.122) who, as an anthropologist, was living with the Ik in Northern Uganda at a time when refugees were fleeing from the South Sudan.

“... we had a steady trickle of refugees coming through Kidepo mostly Didinga herders. Those who were at the end of their tether, ill or injured, and with no wealth, were sent on down to Kaabong, where, they were told, they would be helped if they could survive the final 2-day walk. But those who had wealth of any kind were ushered with great protestations of friendship into a kind of refugee camp that the Ik thought up themselves. It was at the lower end of Kauar's long, narrow village, just across from me. The village even constructed a *boma* to contain the Didinga cattle and goats, but it was placed at the other end, away from the Didinga and convenient to the hungry Ik. Didinga who were thus welcomed never lasted long before they too joined the stream of refugees flowing on down to Kaabong, where in fact there was a generous and well-conceived working system for resettling them as farmers near Debesien.” (Turnbull, 1973, p. 122).

This combination of welcome and theft may be exceptional; certainly the Ik, as portrayed by Turnbull, were unusually unscrupulous and desperate. But one is, all the same, left wondering about what happens in hundreds of other situations, especially but not only where there are ethnic differences.

#### *Cheap labour, dear food*

The terms of trade for labour against food are crucial. Their labour is often all that refugees have to sell; but refugee influxes turn the terms of trade dramatically against it: wages are driven down, and food prices up. In the refugee concentration at Wad-el-Hiliewu in the Sudan in 1975, the Eritrean refugee influx drove the daily wage rate down from 50 piastres to 35. In South Kivu daily casual wages in the mid-1970's, when many poor refugees who had to rely on wage labour, remained constant in money terms at a time of sharp inflation in food prices. Hansen found in Zambia in an area of self-settlement that

“Refugees who earn all their food through exchanging their labour live a truly hard to mouth existence. Without any guaranteed large food supply to begin with, they must immediately set to work to earn that day's food. Needing food every day they must acquire it in a semi- or completely processed form. They do not have the 3-5 day grace period that is needed to completely process cassava.” (Hansen, 1979a).

They then got fewer calories for their work. At the time of his research, 1970-1972, 1 day's work would only earn 2 days' supply of processed cassava, and a further day was required to earn enough fish and relish for 2 days' food. Thus

“A husband and wife, if both worked a normal work day every day, would earn only enough to feed themselves. If they had any children or other dependents who could not work, or if one of the two people became ill and could not work, they had to eat less than the normal quantity of food and a less desirable relish.” (Hansen, 1979a).

As he puts it, if refugees have to resort to this means of obtaining cassava “they will only slowly shed their poverty and lose their visible signs of recent immigration”. (Hansen, 1979a). Indeed, the land available for cultivation by refugees was 6 or 7 miles from the village; the struggle to become established through clearing and cultivating their own fields must have been exceptionally hard, if indeed it could be achieved at all.

#### *Poor access to land*

Land may not be available, or only too little, or only poor land, or only land distant from settlement, or only on an insecure basis; or combinations of these. Land tenure in Africa is changing rapidly under the pressures of legislation, administration, economic development and population growth. Sociologists and social anthropologists' perceptions lag, given their gestation periods between research, writing, and reading and teaching based on the research. Buying and selling the usufruct of the land, especially where there is population pressure, is increasingly the norm. Secure access to land for refugees on traditional terms must be declining. In any case, it has probably been exaggerated. Five examples can illustrate the diffi-

culty of secure establishment upon adequate land outside organized settlements.

- In Uganda, Rwandese refugees who had been farming under arrangements they had made on their own were displaced by their landlords when in 1975, a Land Reform Bill was being considered. The landlords feared that a policy of land to the tiller would rob them of their rights if their tenants remained. The refugees ceased to be rural and presented themselves as individual urban cases at the UNHCR Branch Office in Kampala.
- In Bas Zaire, according to Grenfell (1967, p. 1069), the plots of land given to Angolan refugees were far too small for many of them.
- In South Kivu in Zaire, some Barundi refugees who managed to rent land were driven off either when they had completed the hard work of land preparation, or when their crops were growing, the benefits falling to the landholder and the refugee losing all; and very few obtained access to land adequate for a family livelihood.
- In Tanzania, an estimated 75,000 Barundi refugees settled themselves in 1972 in the Kigoma Region. But as villagization took place in rural Tanzania 2-3 years later, over 10,000 of them were displaced and became a major new influx into the organized settlements of Ulyankulu and Katumba.
- In Zambia, some of the refugees who had settled near the Angola border some 4-6 years earlier were transferred by the Government to the organized settlement at Meheba.

#### *Political and legal vulnerability*

Self-settled refugees are vulnerable politically and legally. They are easy victims for blackmail, exploitation and expropriation. They can be threatened variously with repatriation and arrest. If they begin to achieve modest economic success, they may become hypervulnerable to harassment or expropriation. They may be kept poor not just by their initial poverty, low wages, lack of work and lack of food, but also by petty persecution and lack of security. They then keep a low profile and avoid investment. Tree crops (coffee, cashew, etc.) have been grown on organized settlements. Self-settled refugees are much less likely to plant them. Quite apart from lack of capital, and difficulty foregoing food crops while the tree crops grow, they are unlikely to have secure enough access to land, or to wish to draw attention to themselves, or to be prepared to risk losing all through arbitrary expropriation.

#### *First to suffer, last to gain*

Poor and weak and rural people are the first to suffer and the last to gain. Rural refugees, starting impoverished and often

in a weak position vis-a-vis government bureaucracy, are especially likely to suffer. The land they can cultivate will be the most distant or the least fertile or both. Many may need credit, but it may be on worse terms than for those who have more assets; although not for a refugee situation, Margaret Haswell has found in a Gambian village that the poor paid much higher interest rates – up to 157%, than those with assets in livestock, as low as 49% (Haswell, 1975). Self-settling refugees are also unlikely, short of special interventions, to have equal access to education for their children. And in any famine they will be the first to starve.

#### *Costs to the poorer hosts*

The costs to host populations of supporting refugees are easily overlooked. Those who are wealthy and powerful may often benefit. A notable in the Sudan who welcomed Eritreans was unlikely to regret the presence of cheap labour, fed moreover by WFP, since he needed 250 labourers for weeding and harvesting. In another instance, in South Kivu, two *chefs de collectivité* vied with each other to welcome a settlement for refugees whose numbers would enhance their importance and perhaps bring a clinic and a school in their wake. Again, if food is sold to refugees, those – the wealthier – with food to sell gain from high prices. Cheap labour and dear food and dear food help the 'haves'.

They also harm the 'have-nots'. The poorer people in a host population often lose. Refugees who drive down the terms of trade for labour against food impoverish those who rely partly or entirely on labouring for their livelihoods. When the International Red Cross closed down their work of feeding refugees in Bas Zaire in 1962 before the first harvest was due, "... food supplies for the whole area were very low. This and rising prices affected the local population as well; the latter could not afford to buy ... ." (Grenfell 1967, p. 1064). When Mozambiquan refugees arrived in the East Province of Zambia in 1965, in an area which was "almost regularly stricken by famine" (Aall 1967, p. 29), it is scarcely surprising that local people as well as refugees presented themselves for food rations; those who have little food and share it with others also starve, and starve because of their generosity. When it was noted, after the Barundi influx into South Kivu, that the children of local people as well as of refugees had kwashiorkor, this may not have reflected their previous poverty as much as the effects of the refugees' presence: they may have had kwashiorkor *because of* the refugees. The cruellest cut of all is if refugees can afford to work for starvation wages because they have free food, and the poor among the hosts cannot.

Pressure on land can also hurt the hosts. For Gambela in Ethiopia Anthony Ellman observed that

"in the absence of other sources of assistance, the refugees have been forced to depend on the local farmers for food in the first year, and have also reduced the total amount of



high quality land and water resources available" (Ellman, 1972, p. 10)

apparently a zero sum situation in which many of the hosts may be presumed to have lost. More clearly, this was the case in Bas Zaire. Pressure on the land contributed to deteriorating agricultural conditions in Kongo Central, and there was a discernable worsening in the living conditions of both refugees and the indigenous population. (Holborn 1975, pp. 1059-1060).

The pattern must not be overdrawn. There may be cases where almost all of a host population gains, for example if land is abundant and if refugees initially provide cheap labour which enables the hosts to cultivate larger areas. With assisted self-settlement, improved services may also benefit all the hosts. But generally, unless there are special interventions, the poorer people in a host population are, at the least, at risk and may be seriously impoverished.

## THE FUTURE

### *Trends*

The practical implications of this analysis depend on trends and should look to the future. Numbers of refugees are difficult to foresee. Estimated numbers of officially acknowledged refugees in Africa have been rising from 400,000 in 1964 and 700,000 in 1967 (Hamrell 1967, pp. 14-15) to 1.2 million in 1976, and 2.1 million in early 1979 (UNHCR, 1979a). Whether the actual numbers of refugees, including those not recognized, has been rising is less clear. Future officially acknowledged numbers will depend on repatriations, on political developments, especially in Southern Africa and in the larger African countries, and on whether diplomatic pressures, for example through the OAU or from the UN system, will lead to acknowledgement of refugees who at present officially do not exist. However, short of major international disasters, three trends can be foreseen in the composition and problems of refugees.

The first is a rise in levels of education and aspiration in refugees. From 1960 to 1972, primary school enrolments in Africa doubled, from 19 million to 37 million (ECA, 1978, p. 70), representing an annual growth rate of 5.7%. But over the same period, the rate of growth in secondary and tertiary enrolments was about 10% each (Colclough, personal communication). In 1975 over half the primary school age population was in school, and the percentage had in many countries been rising fast. Even if these rates of growth slow, the proportion of the adult population of Africa that is educated will continue to grow, and with it the proportion of refugees who are educated and who have higher aspirations and expectations.

The second is increasing difficulty for refugees seeking access to land. The population of Africa South of the Sahara is rising at over 2.5% p. a. (World Bank, 1978, p. 51). An FAO estimate has put increases in rural populations, after allowing for rural-urban migration, for the quarter century 1975-2000, as follows (percentages):

Botswana	65
Ethiopia	70
Ghana	53
Kenya	109
Nigeria	82
Rwanda	96
Sudan	89
Tanzania	107
Upper Volta	67
Zaire	44
Zambia	44
Zimbabwe-Rhodesia	100

Unoccupied land is being, and will continue to be, very rapidly colonized (Mbithi and Barnes, 1975). Most land tenure systems are shifting towards less communal and more commercial relationships. Land pressure and the market for land can hardly fail to make obtaining land for refugee settlement, whether organized or self-settlement, increasingly difficult.

The third is a rise in the proportion of refugees who will wish to define themselves as individual urban cases. This follows partly from the explosion in education and aspiration, partly from difficulty obtaining land, and partly from very rapid urbanization. In many African countries, the urban population has been projected to rise by at least threefold in the quarter century 1975-2000. Refugees who are urban in origin can be expected to seek to be urban in destination.

### *Action and research*

The three trends of rising education and aspirations, greater difficulty in obtaining land, and more refugees wanting to go to urban areas, implies closer administration and higher costs in refugee programmes. The options will differ case by case. If refugees of rural origin are not to become urban, and if they are not to be placed in camps, then there are three main options.

(i) *Organized settlement.* If adequate land can be found, this may often be the best option in the 1980's; but land for organized settlement is becoming scarcer.

(ii) *Unassisted self-settlement.* On the evidence presented in this paper, this appears a harsh alternative, especially for the poorer and weaker refugees, unless the alternatives are very unattractive for them. However, their wishes should be weighed; and migrant labouring, for example, may sometimes provide an adequate livelihood, as perhaps for some refugees in Kassala Province in the Sudan. More has to be found out about the costs and benefits of different strategies for unassisted self-settlement for different categories of refugees.

(iii) *Assisted self-settlement.* It may well emerge that for many rural refugees, this will present the best combination of the desirable and the feasible.

For more extensive and effective assisted self-settlement deliberate steps are required to offset the systemic biases in the perceptions of staff which prevent them from seeing the deprivation of rural refugees. Perhaps the most efficient method

is to require staff themselves to undertake research. UNHCR, for example, might arrange mini-sabbaticals, preferably during the rains when things are most difficult for the poorer people, for its staff to undertake investigations of self-settling refugees on the spot. This could be supplemented by sensitive social science research, where possible including refugees themselves, in a range of representative locations. Comparative knowledge would be useful on the impoverishment of refugees, sources of food and the terms on which it is obtained, welcome and hospitality, wage rates and opportunities to work, access to land, indicators of deprivation (body weights, birth-weights, sickness, malnutrition, mortality, morbidity), social relations, migration, effects on the family, attitudes to and relations with authorities, and above all pathways to becoming securely established, and how these can be supported, and how and why some refugees remain impoverished and insecure, and how that could be overcome. The objective should be to avoid myths, either positive or negative, and to work towards a clearer understanding of things as they are.

This should be complemented by efforts to learn from past and present experience with assisted self-settlement. Many interventions have been undertaken and are well known, but systematic evaluation has not often been carried out. Monitoring and evaluation would be useful for interventions such as issues of food, ration cards, cooking equipment and clothing; providing tools and seeds; obtaining land; identifying craftsmen and other specialists and giving them their tools of trade and helping them to get established; and strengthening health and education services. Special attention might be paid to the detailed effects of food supplies and of terminating

them, and to methods for obtaining secure and adequate access to land. UNHCR's experience in South Kivu could be a source of useful lessons here. Effects of interventions on the poorer people in host populations also deserves investigation. Finally, further comparisons would be useful between refugees with assisted self-settlement and refugees in organized settlements.

More attention to assisted self-settlement implies a more staff-intensive and more development-oriented approach than has been common in the past. Assisting the establishment of poor refugees among an existing rural population, especially where there is a shortage of land, requires fine-pointing, which in turn requires funds, and perceptive and imaginative staff. It would be surprising, given the poverty-orientation of donor agencies, if funds could not be found to support such approaches. It is less likely to be finance, and more likely to be lack of suitable staff, that is an impediment. Action can be suggested on two fronts.

First, implementing the resolution of the Panafrican conference on Refugees in Africa:

"studies of the social, educational and economic situation rural refugees outside organized settlement schemes should be undertaken by governments in cooperation with the appropriate international and non-governmental organizations with a view to providing governments and international organizations with the basic information necessary to formulate programmes of assistance and to securing the necessary financial support to implement such programmes".

Second, recruiting and training more staff who will have eyes to see, and the will to act.

## REFERENCES

- Aall C., *Refugee Problems in Southern Africa*, (Edited by Hamrell) pp. 26-44 (1967).
- Brittain V., Report in *The Guardian* (21 May 1979a).
- Brittain V., Report in *The Guardian* (6 June 1979b).
- Brooks, H.C. and El-Ayouty, Y. (editors), *Refugees South of the Sahara: an African Dilemma*. Negro Universities Press, Westport, Connecticut (1970).
- Chambers R., Aldington T.J., Jewitt T. and Reinton P.O., *Report of an Independent Evaluation Mission on the Integrated Rural Development Project BD 1-7*. International University Exchange Fund, Geneva (1971).
- Chambers R., Longhurst R., Bradley D. and Feachem R., *Seasonal dimensions to rural poverty: analysis and practical implications*, *IDS Discussion Paper* 142, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton February 1979).
- ECA, *Survey of Economic and Social Conditions in Africa 1976-1977*, United Nations, New York (1978).
- Ellman A.O., *An Agricultural and Socio-Economic Survey of South Sudan Refugee Settlements and Surrounding Areas in Gambela Awraja, Ethiopia* Institute of Agricultural Research, Addis Ababa (April 1972).

- Enahoro P., African Refugees, *Africa* 57 (May 1976).
- Feldman D., Appraisal of the economic viability of four refugee settlements in Southern Tanzania, typescript (1971).
- Goffman E., The characteristics of total institutions, in: *Complex Organizations: a Sociological Reader* (Edited by A. Etzioni) pp. 312-340. Holt, Reinhart and Winston, New York (1962).
- Gosselin G., *Le Changement Social et les Institutions du Développement dans une Population Réfugiée*, UN Research Institute for Social Development and Office of the UNHCR, Geneva (1970).
- Grenfell W.D., An account of refugees and refugee work based on Kibentele Baptist Mission, Bas Zaire (1967) quoted in *extenso* in Holborn Vol. II, 1063-1078 (1975).
- Hamrell S., (editor) *Refugee Problems in Africa*, Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Uppsala (1967).
- Hansen A., Once for running stops; assimilation of Angolan refugees into Zambian border villages, *Disasters* 3 (4) 369-374 (1979a).
- Hansen A., Managing Refugees: Zambia's Response to Angolan Refugees 1966-1977, *Disasters* 3 (4) 375-380 (1979b).
- Haswell M., *The Nature of Poverty: a Case History of the First Quarter-Century after World War II*. Macmillan, London and Basingstoke p. 186 (1975).
- Holborn L.W., *Refugees: a Problem of Our Time*, 2 Volumes, The Scarecrow Press, Metuchen, N.J. (1975).
- Knight D., *Refugees: Africa's Challenge*, a special report by Christian Aid, Christian Aid, P.O. Box No. 1, London SW9 8BH (1978).
- Mbithi P. and Barnes C., *The Spontaneous Settlement Problem in Kenya*, East African Literature Bureau, Kampala, Nairobi, Dar es Salaam (1975).
- Merusi M., *Reinstallation des Réfugiés Soudanais en République Centrafricaine*, Bureau pour le Développement de la Production Agricole, 202 rue de la Croix-Nivert, Paris 15e.
- Moris J.R., *The Evaluation of Settlement Schemes Performance: a Sociological Appraisal*, University of East Africa, Social Science Conference Paper, No. 430 (January 1967).
- Morsink H.J.A., *Appraisal of the Social Viability of Four Refugee Settlement Schemes in Southern Tanzania*, UN Office at Geneva, Division of Social Affairs (1971).
- Omari C.K., *The Strategy for Rural Development: Tanzania Experience*, East African Literature Bureau, Nairobi, Kampala, Dar es Salaam (1976).
- Potholm C., Africa's persistent problem, *Africa Report*, March-April (1976).
- Potten, D., Etsha: a successful resettlement scheme, *Botswana Notes and Records* 8, 105-119 (1976).
- Republic of Botswana, *The Rural Income Distribution Survey in Botswana 1974-1975*, Government Printer, Gaborone (1976).
- Sokiri, A.R., *The Social Problems and Political Predicament of Refugees: a Case Study of Ibuga Refugee Settlement in West Uganda, 1967-1971*, The University of Dar-es-Salaam, Student Dissertation, Political Science (1972).
- Trappe P., *Social Change and Development Institutions in a Refugee Population*, UNHCR, Geneva (1971).
- Turnbull, C., *The Mountain People*. Pan Books, London (1973).
- UNHCR, *Reasons for Hope*, UNHCR, Geneva (1979a).
- UNHCR, *News from the UNHCR*, No. 1, March/April (1979b).
- Van der Meeren A.J.L., *Burundi – Project Rural Integrated Development of the Chankuzo-Mosso Area*, Bujumbura (December 1969).
- World Bank, *World Development Report 1978*, The World Bank, 1818 H Street, N.W., Washington D.C. 20433 (1978).

Yeld, R. (1965) Implications of experience with refugee settlement, East African Institute of Social Research Conference Paper, Makerere University College, reproduced with author's permission by UNHCR as HCR/14076, GE. 76-5224.

Yeld R., The resettlement of refugees, in: *Land Settlement and Rural Development in Eastern Africa* (Edited by R. Apthorpe) Nkanga 3 Transition Books, Kampala (1968).

Zartman I.W., In: *Portuguese Guinean Refugees in Senegal*, (edited by Brooks and El-Ayouty) pp. 143-161.