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development

Effectiveness of various refugee settlement approaches

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Question

What lessons have we learnt on the effectiveness of various refugee settlement approaches (integration in towns/communities, informal settlements, formal settlements, camps) with regard to:

- *Supporting protection for refugees and host communities: how do respective approaches help to uphold refugees' rights, protect them from e.g. exploitation and abuse, support social cohesion and enable their access to formal and informal protection mechanisms and services?*
- *Delivering assistance and supporting self-reliance among refugees and host communities: how do various models enable or not self-reliance, help manage public health risks, and deliver wider economic benefits to the host communities?*

Contents

1. Overview

This review of the effectiveness of different approaches to refugee settlement shows that the 'traditional' approach of setting up refugee camps is ineffective in many respects - particularly in terms of promoting self-reliance - and hence to be avoided. The recommendation in policy circles is now for alternatives to camps that provide economic opportunities to refugees, allow mixing with host populations, do not set up parallel service delivery systems, and seek to benefit both refugees and host communities. However, perhaps because the policy shift away from camps is only recent, there is less clarity about what these alternatives would look like in practice and very few large-scale examples of this.

- **The literature identifies a number of different approaches to refugee settlement** – camps, formal and informal settlements, self-settlement among local populations - but there is a lack of clarity on the definition of each; they are rather seen as forming a continuum from closed camps to integration. They differ principally in the freedom of movement and the economic opportunities they allow refugees.

- **The literature review shows there is very little comparative research on different refugee settlement approaches**.

- **However, there is widespread evidence and a general consensus that refugee camps are not an effective approach**. While they offer some benefits (notably ease of aid distribution) these are outweighed by the negative effects.

- This report focuses on the effectiveness of different approaches with regard to protection, economic impact and public health impact:

  o **Refugee protection** – camps facilitate provision of protection services to refugees, but also pose dangers to refugees, particularly vulnerable groups such as women and children. Self-settlement also poses risks to refugees.

  o **Economic impact** – camps promote dependency among refugees and, in the long run, pose a financial burden to host countries. Allowing refugees access to economic opportunities helps make them self-sufficient, and can have positive effects on the host population. Different approaches to combining refugee assistance and development have been attempted, with varying results.

  o **Public health** – refugees face serious health risks in typically overcrowded camps, though it can be easier for aid agencies to provide health services in camps. Urban refugees can face difficulties in accessing medical care. The literature clearly warns against setting up parallel service delivery systems (for refugees and local populations).

- **In recent years there has been a marked policy shift away from camps to alternatives**, seen for example in UNHCR's 2014 policy, and in the Sustainable Development Goals.

- **While there is a clear consensus that camps are not effective, there is less clarity about what alternative approaches entail and even less evidence (e.g. large-scale case studies) on these** (in part because the policy shift towards alternatives to camps is only recent).

- **What emerges instead is a number of principles or recommendations to follow**, e.g. allowing economic opportunities to refugees, not restricting their freedom of movement.

2. Refugee settlement approaches

Definitions and characteristics

Refugee[1] situations can take different forms: camps, informal settlements, planned formal settlements, self-settlement (integration in host populations).

a) Camps are purpose-built for refugees and administered by UNHCR and/or host governments. Food, water and services such as schooling and health care are provided by relief agencies. Refugees in camps are not expected to be self-sufficient. Camps are generally conceived as temporary though in practice this is often not the case.

b) UNHCR (cited in Harrell-Bond, 2000: 3) defines a settlement as: 'a deliberate and coherent package and administrative measures whereby a group of refugees is enabled to settle on land, usually in an uninhabited or sparsely-populated area, with a view to creating new self-supporting rural communities that ultimately will form part of the economic and social system of the area.'

c) Self-settlement occurs when refugees share local households or set up temporary accommodation, and are assisted by local families or community organisations (Jacobsen, 2003). Self-settled refugees have no legal refugee status within the host country, but are often active in the local economy despite legal restrictions on such activities.

However, distinctions between these are 'effectively blurred' and definitions 'frequently lack objective criteria and clear demarcations' (Schmidt, ND: 2-3). Van Damme (1998, cited in Schmidt, ND) places patterns of refugee settlement in a continuum from integration/non-camps to segregation/closed camps. The literature identifies the following considerations as relevant when attempting to distinguish between camps, settlements and self-settlement:

- *Freedom of movement* - This is most restricted in camps. Settlements are generally seen as allowing refugees greater freedom of movement, while self-settlement (integration within host communities) by definition allows unrestricted movement.

- *Mode of assistance* - Camps are generally based on relief handouts and food distribution with little possibility for refugees to engage in income-generating activities. Organised settlements allow refugees to engage in a wider range of economic activities, indeed, refugees are expected to become self-sufficient pending their repatriation (Jacobsen, 2003). Self-settled refugees tend to be more integrated into the local economy – be it with or without government permission (Schmidt, ND; Jacobsen, 2003).

- *Mode of governance* - This refers to the mode of decision-making within or over the refugee community. Camps are often run by aid agencies and refugees have far less of a position as it pertains to governance of the camps. By contrast, those in settlements often have much more voice in terms of the decision-making and politics of the settlement.

- *Temporary vs. permanent shelter* - Refugee camps are viewed as having temporary shelters (e.g. tents) while settlements are often seen as having more permanent shelter structures (Jacobsen, 2003).

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[1] In international law a refugee is defined as an individual who 'owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable or unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country' (Muedini, 2015).

- *Population size or density* - Numbers of refugees in settlements can be much lower than in camps, and are often more controlled than in the latter. At a camp the influx of refugees can be quite high, particularly if a conflict is ongoing; there can also be more fluidity in the population. Moreover, refugees in organised settlements can be provided access to land by the host government (Jacobsen, 2003).

General comparison: pros and cons

Schmidt (ND: 6) notes that 'not many texts systematically compare the effects of camp and settlement situations on refugee welfare, host economies, and political structures, or general levels of security and conflict'. She attributes this to a lack of available research, as well as 'the general tendency within refugee studies to eschew potentially problematic comparisons in favour of in-depth case studies' (Schmidt, ND: 6). Further methodological issues make structured comparison of camps and settlements difficult. These include (Schmidt, ND: 6):

- *Differences in population* – it is repeatedly the case that the most vulnerable and weakest stay within the camps and the more able refugees avoid them;
- *Third variables* – increasingly, studies that focus on refugee impact on local communities emphasize the importance of local context for success and failure of the pursuit of an ever-wider range of refugee policy aims;
- *Interdependence of cases* – in many cases, refugees may live in different settlement patterns co-existing in the same host country, and linkages may exist between them. In such instances, refugees might be doubly based, using both the camp and the outside to ensure their personal or family livelihoods and/or survival.

Nonetheless, some clear arguments in relation to camps and settlements/self-settlement do emerge from the literature. Critiques of camps focus on the following aspects (Schmidt, ND: 7; UNHCR, 2014: 4):

- Camps prevent integration of refugees and host communities;
- Camps increase dependency on relief aid and weaken the ability of refugees to manage their own lives – this perpetuates the trauma of displacement and creates barriers to solutions, whatever form they take;
- Camps undermine the rights (including socio-economic and political rights) that refugees are supposed to enjoy as both refugees and as human beings;
- Camps may increase critical protection risks, including sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), child protection concerns and human trafficking;
- Camps ignore the capacities and resources of refugees themselves;
- Camps neglect the repercussions of a refugee influx on the host population. Camps can distort local economies and development planning, while also causing negative environmental impacts in the surrounding area.

Defenders of camps argue that they provide a controlled setting and are better than settlements/self-settlement in (Schmidt, ND: 7):

- Attracting international assistance due to the higher visibility of impact;
- Monitoring and targeting recipients and distributing aid faster and more effectively, especially in the short-run and in immediate emergency situations;
- Upholding international standards of assistance, particularly for curative health care and primary education facilities;
- Facilitating organised repatriation of refugees.

This report focuses on the advantages and disadvantages of different refugee situations in relation to protection, economic development and public health. These are detailed in the remaining sections of the report.

3. Refugee protection

Non-camp approaches are considered to go further than camps in meeting the basic rights of refugees. Kobia and Cranfield (2009: 10) stress that: 'The right to freedom of movement is enshrined in international refugee legislation as well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, yet it is often disregarded by governments hosting refugees…. *(they)* often try to keep refugees segregated from the local population, forbidding them from leaving camps or settlements'. As noted in the characteristics above, there is greater freedom of movement for refugees in organised settlements and self-settlement compared to camps, plus greater opportunities for refugees to work. However, the literature makes a distinction between refugees in camps or organised settlements, and those who have self-settled in urban areas with regard to their legal status. Governments brand those who self-settle in urban settings illegal (Kobia & Cranfield, 2009). Self-settled refugees have no legal status within the host country (Jacobsen, 2003).

Risks to women and children in camps

A large proportion of assisted refugees tend to be women and children (Crisp, 2002, cited in Schmidt, ND: 18). There is growing realisation of the considerable implications that modes of assistance have for refugee women and children. The literature stresses the dangers posed to women and children in camps: 'In refugee camps, disruptions to community support structures, unsafe physical surroundings, separation from families, and patriarchal governing structures often heighten women and children's vulnerability to gender-based violence. Problems with camp location and design may exacerbate these problems. For example, many Burundian refugee women and girls in Tanzania were raped while traveling long distances to collect firewood.' (HRW, 2003: 36).

The risks of gender-based violence become greater in protracted refugee crises: 'Refugees are often frustrated by their long-term refugee status and unemployment. Rates of alcoholism as well as anxiety and depression may be high. Competing international crises and seemingly intractable refugee situations may result in "donor fatigue." In some cases, as funding and international attention has decreased, the combination of scarce resources and male-dominated camp leadership and distribution structures has exposed refugee women and girls to exploitative situations where they exchanged sexual favours for aid supplies' (HRW, 2003: 36). In long-standing refugee camps, management structures tend to shift from international NGOs and UNHCR to refugee-run structures. While empowerment of refugees is a good thing, 'in many cases, their governing structures involve harmful traditional practices and conflict-resolution methods that perpetuate gender-based violence' (HRW, 2003: 36).

Self-settlement risks

But self-settlement in urban areas also poses dangers for refugees. 'Refugees may be vulnerable to exploitation, arrest or detention, and can be forced to compete with the poorest

local workers for the worst jobs' (UNHCR[2]). Self-settlement also makes it difficult to address the specific needs of vulnerable groups: 'In the past, many refugees living in cities were young men with the skills and savvy to survive on their own. Today, we are seeing increasing numbers of women, who may have been raped or abused before escaping their countries, as well as children and older people who all need special help' (UNHCR[3]).

A literature review on urban refugees highlights some of the challenges faced by those who opt to self-settle in urban areas (Kobi & Cranfield, 2009: 11-12):

- In cases where refugees are seen to be doing economically better than locals, xenophobia and discrimination are common;
- Landlords and employers know that refugees receive assistance and exploit them into paying higher rent or accepting lower wages;
- Much of the literature documents the frequency with which refugees are victims of physical violence at the hands of local populations;
- Local populations often take advantage of refugees' vulnerability by offering them exploitative and dangerous conditions of employment in the informal sector or by charging them vastly higher fees than nationals for rent and housing;
- By far the most commonly reported source of insecurity for urban refugees is abuse of power by police and authorities. The most common form of abuse is arrest or harassment as a means to extort bribes from refugees. This is often coupled with detention and the threat of deportation.
- Whether the perpetrators are the police, the local community or other immigrants, refugees are often unable to respond to mistreatment and to claim their rights or access justice.

The US Department of State (2012) stresses that, 'Refugee protection should be provided irrespective of location and the international community should address needs where they exist, rather than where it is easiest to address them'. UNHCR makes a number of recommendations to overcome the challenges that arise when refugees are not consolidated in camps and to ensure that refugees with specific needs and vulnerabilities, child protection risks and SGBV issues do not remain hidden. These include 'strengthening community-based protection, monitoring, outreach and case management, including increased direct engagement with refugee and host communities, through mobile monitoring teams, community centres, the co-location of government, UNHCR and partner services ("one-stop shops") and the use of virtual platforms to facilitate information sharing and two-way communication' (UNHCR, 2014: 11). It also calls for updating of protection and programme management policies, operational guidance and tools to meet the challenges of assessment and targeting assistance, and for measuring progress and reporting on results in non-camp situations (UNHCR, 2014: 10).

4. Economic impact

Self-reliance among refugees

There is general consensus in the literature that, with regard to livelihoods, self-settlement is far better for refugees in the long-run than relying on handouts in camps (Hovil, 2014; Schmidt, ND;

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[2] http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/urban-refugees.html
[3] http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/urban-refugees.html

Jacobsen, 2003). When discussing refugees and livelihoods, two aspects are particularly relevant in the debate about settlement approaches: the issue of dependency and the issue of 'negative' and 'positive' coping mechanisms – a term that seems to be used to refer to all the ways in which refugees organise themselves to sustain their livelihoods.

On the former, camps are seen as creating passive dependency among refugees; this is especially the case for prolonged residence in camps. One study of Somali refugees in Ethiopian camps observed how 'in compensation for the loss of skills as farmers and stockmen they have become skilled manipulators of the international welfare system' (Ryle, 1992, cited in Schmidt, ND: 17). 'By contrast, in urban centres assistance to refugees can be sparse, unevenly distributed, and insufficient to meet basic needs – if it exists at all. For this reason, urban refugees exercise a higher degree of self-sufficiency than those in camps. Refugees settle in urban centres to avoid dependence on rations, boredom, hopelessness, hardships and restrictions that prevail in camps. They use their skills and pursue opportunities provided by greater economic resources, such as education for their children' (Kobia & Cranfield, 2009: 4). UNHCR (2014: 5) also stresses the benefits of self-reliance: 'refugees who have maintained their independence, retained their skills and developed sustainable livelihoods will be more resilient and better able to overcome future challenges than if they had spent years dependent on humanitarian assistance, whatever solutions are eventually available to them'.

Given the reality in many protracted refugee crises that few of the refugees will be able to go back to their homes any time soon (if ever), it becomes paramount that refugees are learning skills that will better prepare them for future employment opportunities in the host country (or in countries that they may resettle in). But getting vocational training in refugee camps is difficult: there are often few educational resources, e.g. areas for study, teachers, computers. It is said that in Jordan's Za'atari refugee camp, "There are some 9,500 young people in the camp aged between 19-24 who need skills training and, like their older counterparts, also need livelihood opportunities. Some 5.2 per cent of these were at university in Syria but had to drop out due to the conflict, while just 1.6 per cent successfully graduated" (UNHCR, 2015b, cited in Muedini, 2015). Self-settlement in urban areas gives refugees opportunities (albeit self-created) to retain or develop skills and earn a livelihood.

On the issue of coping mechanisms, the literature highlights negative coping mechanisms such as theft and prostitution, which refugees may resort to when restrictions in camp settings foreclose economic opportunities for them. As noted in the previous section, as 'donor fatigue' kicks in and international assistance for protracted refugee crises dwindles, scarce resources can be one factor exposing refugee women and girls to exploitative situations where they exchange sexual favours for aid supplies (HRW, 2003: 36). A recent negative 'coping mechanism' seen in the Syrian refugee crisis is onward migration to Europe: 'Condemned to marginal, insecure, and provisional lives in host states, hundreds of thousands of Syrians and other refugees have embarked on perilous journeys to Europe, overwhelming the screening capacity of Greece and Italy. ….Drastic cuts in food aid to refugees by the underfunded UN World Food Programme… have also contributed to the onward migration of Syrians from neighbouring states' (Kerwin, 2016: 90).

Economic impact on host communities

According to Schmidt (ND: 20), there is evidence that both camps and settlements bring benefits as well as costs to host countries. However, she says it is difficult to calculate whether aggregate effects on host populations and land are positive or negative; it is also important to distinguish

between short-term economic impact and long-term transformatory effect (Landau, 2003, cited in Schmidt, ND: 20). A further factor is that 'an accurate assessment of the refugee impact is frequently complicated by the political and economic stakes of the actors involved' (Schmidt, ND: 21).

Camps tend to benefit host countries primarily through the temporary capital influx that comes from relief agencies running the camps. Schmidt argues that the biggest costs (or negative impact, since - at least in cash terms - costs are mainly borne by the international community) of camps probably lie in the large funds required for food aid: those in favour of self-settlement claim that investing those funds in regional economic stimulus packages in refugee-affected areas would benefit host communities far more, having positive multiplier effects on the local economy. Feldman (2007: 52-53) argues that in protracted crises it is host governments who end up paying for camps: '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'.

While acknowledging that refugee flows can place an enormous burden on host countries, Feldman (2007: 54) also identifies how such crises offer opportunities for economic development:

- A refugee influx constitutes an arrival of people with skills that can be utilised to benefit the host state;
- These individuals 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;
- Hosting refugees can mean the development and construction of infrastructure the host country need not pay for and that will last long after the refugees have gone, such as roads and services.

UNHCR (2014: 5) highlights the benefits to the host population of giving refugees economic opportunities: 'Refugees can better contribute to the communities where they are living when they are supported in achieving self-reliance in a way that is adapted to local conditions and markets. In many situations the presence of refugees has stimulated local economies and development'. Gorman (cited in Feldman, 2007: 54) claims 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'. Schmidt (ND) cites numerous studies - ranging from Afghans in Pakistan, to Zambia and Honduras - showing the positive impact of self-settled refugees on sectors of the local economy. This is often only acknowledged after refugees leave an area. 'While Afghan refugees were seen by many as a burden on the economy, their rapid repatriation from Pakistan, particularly from NWFP has caused a sharp downturn in the local economy, with many businesses recording severe losses and facing possible closure after the massive exodus' (Phillips, 2003, cited in Schmidt, ND: 20-21).

A study of refugee economies in Uganda (Betts et al, 2014) challenged a number of common myths about these, including that they are: a) isolated, b) a burden, c) homogenous, d) technologically illiterate, and e) dependent on humanitarian assistance. Rather it found (Betts et al, 2014: 5):

- Refugees are networked within settlements, nationally, and transnationally. Both refugee and Ugandan traders connect refugee settlements to wider economic systems.
- Refugees often make a positive contribution to the host state economy. These contributions are exemplified by the significant volume of exchange between refugees

and Ugandan nationals, as well as by refugees' creation of employment opportunities for Ugandan nationals.

- Refugees are economically diverse and have significant levels of internal inequality. They have a range of different livelihood activities; some are successful entrepreneurs.
- Refugees are users and, in some cases, creators of technology. They have higher levels of internet use than the general population, use mobile phones extensively, and frequently adapt their own appropriate technologies.
- Although many refugees do receive humanitarian assistance, most are more dependent on other social relationships, aspire to receive other forms of support, and in many cases create sustainable livelihood opportunities for themselves.

Combined development and assistance approaches

In recognition of the challenges posed to both refugees and host populations by protracted refugee camps, a number of approaches have been tried that combine assistance to refugees and development:

Zonal development

This was the first attempt at linking refugee aid and development (Feldman, 2007: 54). In this model the areas of a country that host refugees are funded directly, as opposed to channelling refugee assistance funds through the central government. The goal was to enable refugees to become self-sufficient, and 'also to create structures and opportunities for them to earn income as they improved the quality of life for the local community' (Feldman, 2007: 55). Zonal development was attempted in parts of Africa (e.g. in the Democratic Republic of Congo and in Burundi, both in response to influx of Rwandan refugees). While showing marginal success at first, this was not sustained largely because of lack of coordination between refugees and development organisations, and because the projects did not do enough to benefit locals as well as refugees. Key lessons from these experiences include the need for projects to focus on more than just livelihoods and development at the subsistence level to be effective, and the need for integration of efforts by UNHCR and UNDP (i.e. aid and development agencies) (Feldman, 2007: 56).

Organised settlements

This approach was also tried in Africa, from the late 1960s to the 1980s, and in parts of North and South America (e.g. Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Belize, Panama) (Feldman, 2007: 58). Planned rural settlements were set up with the goal of achieving self-sufficiency for refugees in protracted situations. 'Essentially these settlements were similar to refugee camps but provided opportunities to generate income and attain self-sufficiency' (Feldman, 2007: 56). However, such settlements focused solely on refugees and on enabling them to support themselves without local integration; they did not aspire to extend services to locals or benefit the overall area of refugee settlements. As such, they usually created services just for refugees and did nothing to strengthen those of the local community.

Organised settlements appealed to both aid agencies and host governments: they were visible enough to attract donor funding; they concentrated refugees spatially and kept them separate from the local population; they reduced maintenance costs for governments in comparison to camps; and they helped prevent refugees from becoming long-term dependents. However, settlements had many of the same drawbacks as camps – restricting freedom of movement,

limiting economic opportunities, and ultimately failing to achieve their objectives. 'Most organised settlements were unable to achieve or sustain economic self-sufficiency, and most refugees were not integrated into their host countries' (Feldman, 2007: 58).

Development assisted integration (DAI)

Development assisted integration (DAI) is another approach which attempts to help both refugees and host populations: the former to become self-sufficient, and the latter through economic growth. 'Central to the 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' (Feldman, 2007: 60). Key features of the DAI approach are (Feldman, 2007: 59):

- A high degree of freedom of movement: DAI does not confine refugees to camps, but nor does it envision allowing refugees to settle anywhere they choose without regulation, as in the case of self-settlement;
- The ability to settle among the local population;
- Access to income generating opportunities;
- The support of local services and infrastructure: DAI does not create parallel systems but instead strengthens existing services, improving them for both refugees and locals.

In practice, DAI can take many different forms, e.g. refugee self-reliance schemes, zones of residence. There are examples of successful DAI approaches, including projects in Guinea (see case studies), Somalia, Kenya, Uganda, DRC and Zambia (Feldman, 2007: 62).

Challenges

There are a number of challenges to combining assistance and development in the context of refugees, notably resistance on the part of locals, host governments, aid agencies and donors (Feldman, 2007: 60-63):

- *Locals* - can have multiple concerns: fear of competition in the labour market, downward pressure on the low end of the wage scale, ecological damage, competition for scarce resources such as arable land and firewood, fears about security if refugees are not confined to camp, and hostility based on ethnic, cultural, religious and language differences.
- *Host governments* - can have similar concerns, notably about security and the health and environmental impacts of integrating refugees with the local population. They can also be worried about losing international aid if camps are eliminated.
- *For aid agencies* - a greater focus on development moves resources for refugee assistance into the development arena and thus away from refugee (aid) agencies; there are also challenges with inter-agency coordination.
- *Donors* - 'are most satisfied with efforts that produce immediate results, such as the construction of refugee camps or the provision of food' (Feldman, 2007: 63). Such actions are highly visible, and easy to publicise to facilitate continued funding. By contrast, local integration makes refugees less visible.

Case studies of alternatives to camps

Mexico and Guatemalan refugees[4]

More than 200,000 Guatemalans, most from indigenous groups, fled a civil war and counterinsurgency campaign in their own country in the early 1980s. Many arrived in Mexico, where some 46,000 were officially registered by the Mexican government. Though first settled in camps on the border with Guatemala, the refugees were later relocated further away from the border. The Mexican government was keen to pursue a policy of self-sufficiency and local integration for these refugees. With support from UNHCR and donor governments, the refugees were given land, seeds and tools. Although in some cases the land provided was of poor quality, the refugees were able to attain a degree of self-sufficiency through crop diversification and specialised training.

By 1997, tens of thousands of Guatemalans had repatriated, encouraged by the peace agreement between the Guatemalan government and the country's rebel movement. But some 27,000 remained in Mexico; and most of them indicated they wanted to stay. The Mexican government expanded its local integration programme by agreeing to provide the refugees with documents needed to stay in Mexico indefinitely and to provide them with a secure legal status. Of the Guatemalan refugees remaining in Mexico, some 20,000 (as of 1999) were expected to apply for permanent residency, more than half of whom were children who were born in Mexico. Mexico, too, benefitted from local integration: in the states of Campeche and Quintana Roo, refugees constituted 9% of the population but were responsible for 12% of agricultural production.

Guinea and refugees from Liberia and Sierra Leone

Guinea's policy towards refugees from Liberia and Sierra Leone is an example of a successful DAI approach. 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 programmes. According to Barbara Harrell-Bond (2009), 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 programme cost an estimated USD 4 per refugee annually compared with USD 50 for camp-based medical programmes (Feldman, 2007: 59).

5. Public health impact

In the immediate period after a refugee influx, there is typically an initial emergency phase in terms of health needs, with high mortality rates mostly due to 'preventable and treatable infections, often exacerbated by malnutrition, caused mainly by diarrhoeal disease, respiratory tract infections, measles and malaria' (Spiegel, 2002, cited in Schmidt, ND: 14). The focus of health care in this period is on immediate life-saving interventions. But as a refugee crisis becomes prolonged, heath concerns expand. Schmidt (ND: 15) identifies three key health questions in relation to the debate about forms of refugee settlement:

- The effectiveness of emergency health care and how it is affected by different spatial settings;
- The changes necessary for post-emergency settings;

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[4] Adapted from UNHCR, 1999.

- The proper way to manage health services for refugees in a variety of settings, namely via the establishment of parallel centres or attempts to work through local health systems.

Schmidt notes that finding evidence to answer the above questions is challenging due to: unavailability of accurate data on mortality rates (and other health indicators) in camps; what data is available being mainly from the immediate emergency phase (when political interest, media attention and funding is greatest) with far less from post-emergency phases; lack of research on the health situation of refugees not living in camps.

In terms of health outcomes for refugees, the literature highlights both the benefits of camps and their negative effects. On the plus side there is widespread evidence that camps allow quick detection and treatment of health problems for refugees. Moreover, in some refugee camps quality of services (see below) can be better than in the refugees' home countries, leading to improvements in, for example, HIV infection rates.[5] On the minus side (Schmidt, ND; Unite for Sight):

- Overcrowding in large camps, poor access to water and inadequate shelter are major factors in epidemics and high mortality rates among displaced people. Common diseases include measles, cholera and dysentery;

- There are also higher rates of STIs and increased rates of HIV transmission found in refugee camps due to engagement with sex workers, rape, and insufficient access to reproductive health services.[6]

- Common deficiencies in refugee camps are protein and vitamins A and C. Malnutrition stems from insufficient quantity of food, erratic supply, insufficient micronutrient composition and lack of variety and palatability. Wilson (1992, cited in Schmidt, ND: 16) argues that camps which restrict movement and economic and personal freedoms of the inhabitants can encourage malnutrition; allowing refugees to trade food, make earnings through access to labour markets and/or commerce, farming or livestock raising, would improve refugees' nutritional situation;

- There is a clear correlation between camps of increasing size and elevated mortality.

- Mental health problems can be greater in camps and harder to address. 'The longer a refugee resides in a camp, the harder it can become to sustain psychological well-being' (McClleland, 2014, cited in Muedini, 2015). Typically there are few support services in camps.

- Refugee camps present even greater barriers to care than most other settings in the developing world because they tend to be remote, poorly accessible by road, and have a limited power supply. In addition, the limited amount of resources that camps have, combined with growing populations, puts great strain on basic resources such as food and water.

- The high mobility of the refugee setting, with the constant inflow and outflow of people, presents a unique challenge because it is difficult to provide sustained care over a period of time.

Little is known about the comparative effectiveness of providing healthcare for refugees in camps and taking an integrative approach to refugee health care. A study of Guinea where refugee

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[5] Unite for Sight: http://www.uniteforsight.org/refugee-health/module1
[6] Unite for Sight: http://www.uniteforsight.org/refugee-health/module1

health care was integrated into the local health system found that, 'the resources of the refugee assistance programme not only served the refugees but also significantly improved the local health system and transport infrastructure' and concluded: 'the non-directive refugee policy in Guinea…may be a cost-effective alternative to camps' (Van Damme et al, 1998, cited in Schmidt, ND: 16).

With regard to service delivery (and wider impact on the host population), the literature stresses the need to mainstream services, ensure that the host population gets the same quality of services as refugees, and not set up parallel systems. Camps can thus be particularly detrimental in this regard: 'Camps, whose services are offered 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' (Feldman, 2007: 53). Feldman stresses the tensions that arise when refugees and host communities get different quality of services. Parallel systems are seen as 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…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' (Feldman, 2007: 53).

Refugees who opt for self-settlement in urban areas may avoid many of the health risks associated with camps, but are frequently unable to access medical (or education) services, primarily due to their economic situation and social position as refugees. Kobia and Cranfield (2009: 13) give several examples of urban refugees' lack of access to medical care:

- One survey found that help with access to medical services was the most beneficial aid that the NGO community could offer urban refugees in Cairo;
- In Malaysia, the cost of care combined with a language barrier and discrimination prevented urban refugees from receiving sufficient healthcare;
- In South Africa it was observed that health officials fail to distinguish between refugees and other immigrants and therefore deny refugees access to basic health services to which they are entitled.

6. Shift in approaches to refugee settlement

Trends

Protracted refugee crises in which people are displaced for extended periods, are increasing in frequency and scale. Kerwin (2016: 88) points out: 'By the end of 2015, 6.7 million refugees lived in protracted situations; that is, they had been displaced for at least five years and had no immediate prospects of repatriation, incorporation into host communities, or third-country resettlement. The average protracted refugee situation has lasted 26 years. Some refugee camps and urban settings are now home to a third generation of displaced persons, including the 1.6 million Afghani refugees in Pakistan'. This is echoed by Hatoupis and Ben Ali (2016): 'Camps, as their name suggests, are intended to be temporary solutions. Yet this is rarely the case: Dadaab and Kakuma for example are 25 years old. Dadaab was built in 1992 to provide temporary housing for 90,000 refugees fleeing Somalia's violent civil war. It is now the largest refugee camp in the world – and Kenya's third largest "city".'

A further 'trend' to note is that refugee populations are increasingly urban. While it is difficult to gather reliable data, UNHCR estimated that (as of 2012) 58% of refugees lived in cities,

compared to one third living in camps (US DoS, 2012). 'This trend creates new kinds of vulnerabilities and poses new protection challenges for the humanitarian community. It also presents new opportunities to help refugees find ways to be become self-reliant' (US DoS, 2012).

Both these developments – the protracted nature of refugee crises and the increasing numbers of urban refugees – point to the urgent need to find sustainable alternatives to camps.

Policy change

'For decades the default response to refugee crises has been to set up camps or settlements and coerce refugees into them. Camps, it was argued, were best suited to meet the social, economic and political realities in which refugees are living' (Hovil, 2014). The appeal for aid agencies such as UNHCR of camps was that they make aid distribution easier, and provide a 'visible tool' for raising funds. For host governments 'camps are a tangible demonstration that a government is actively responding to a refugee crisis' and again, facilitate mobilising financial and other support from the international community. They also 'play into the narrative that refugees are outsiders, foreigners or a security threat demanding close scrutiny until such time as they can return home' (Hovil, 2014). In this way they help limit local opposition to refugees. However, as discussed in this report, a growing body of research highlights the negative effects of camps on many of those aspects in which they were considered to be advantageous: aid effectiveness, security, service delivery, economic impact and so on (Hovil, 2014; Schmidt, ND).

This has led to a growing shift away from camps to alternatives. Schmidt (ND: 7) states that 'in principle some basic agreement exists among both policy-makers and academics about the frequent undesirability of refugee camps'. This is reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals: 'The SDG migration-related targets speak to the need to channel what often begin as poorly managed, irregular refugee and migrant flows into legal migration and refugee protection systems that maximize the development potential of refugees, migrants, and source and destination communities' (Kerwin, 2016: 93).

The shift away from camps to alternatives is perhaps most clearly seen in a new policy on refugees issued by UNHCR in 2014: 'UNHCR's policy is to avoid the establishment of refugee camps, wherever possible, while pursuing alternatives to camps that ensure refugees are protected and assisted effectively and enabled to achieve solutions. Although many governments require that refugees reside in camps and, at the onset of an emergency, UNHCR may also find it necessary to set up camps to ensure protection and save lives, camps should be the exception and, to the extent possible, a temporary measure' (UNHCR, 2014: 6).

The UNHCR policy does not describe specifically what alternatives to camps would look like, but offers this definition: 'Alternatives to camps are achieved when UNHCR is able to ensure that refugees are protected and assisted effectively and are able to achieve solutions without resorting to the establishment of camps and when existing camps are phased out or transformed into sustainable settlements. From the perspective of refugees, alternatives to camps means being able to exercise rights and freedoms, make meaningful choices regarding their lives and have the possibility to live with greater dignity, independence and normality as members of communities' (UNHCR, 2014: 12).

According to Hovil (2014) the new policy 'stresses the need for respect for refugees' rights, inclusion, innovation and mobility; it recognises the need to work with, rather than against, local communities, who are often the first humanitarian actors on the ground; and it shows an

awareness of the potential for refugees to become productive members of the communities in which they live'. Medecins San Frontieres (MSF) echoes the need to move away from camps, stressing that, 'The alternatives to the refugee camp should be considered when the population is displaced initially, rather than after 25 years of semi-permanent settlement, as is the case in Dadaab'.[7]

However, despite the shift in policy circles away from camps, Schmidt (ND: 1) notes that the 'increasing use of detention centres in the West seems to reintroduce "camp-based" answers to refugee issues here too' – previously camps had often been seen as a third world phenomenon.

Implementation: challenges and recommendations

UNHCR acknowledges that initial costs in setting up alternatives to camps will be greater, but argues that in the long-run the latter are more cost-effective 'because they harness the potential of refugees, rationalise service delivery and allow for more targeted assistance to those most in need' (UNHCR, 2014: 9). Moreover, costs will be offset by reductions in direct assistance, as more refugees become self-reliant and able to meet their own basic needs. As well as greater early investments, the agency identifies strengthened protection outreach and monitoring – which will be more labour and resource intensive than in a camp setting – as essential for effective implementation of alternative approaches (UNHCR, 2014: 9). UNHCR also acknowledges the need to work within the framework of national law and policy in host countries, and hence avoiding camps will not be immediately possible in all situations. 'Implementation of the policy will necessarily be progressive and will proceed at different speeds in UNHCR operations globally' (UNHCR, 2014: 9).

The US Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) endorses the move to alternatives to camps for refugees. The PRM's core principles for engagement in urban areas include:

- *When new displacements arise, the establishment of camps should not always be the first recourse.* At the outset of crises, PRM will work with other members of the international humanitarian community and with host governments to determine whether a non-camp-based response might be most appropriate to achieve protection and assistance goals. PRM will work closely with UNHCR to develop and strengthen models of assistance as alternatives to camps.

- *PRM recognizes that urban settlement is often part of a long-term and even durable solution.* Many urban refugees are achieving *de facto* local integration, and PRM can build on this opportunity by advocating for further progress toward this durable solution, particularly in cases of protracted displacement.

- *Interventions should promote self-reliance.* A key objective of urban response is to promote protection through self-reliance. Access to livelihoods is essential for refugees to be able to cover the cost of meeting basic needs - including food, shelter, health care, and education - and to mitigate against turning to risky activities to survive.

- *Existing local structures should be identified and built upon.* Infrastructure and services already exist in urban environments; humanitarian actors should capitalize upon local

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[7] https://medium.com/@MSF_Crash/from-dadaab-to-calais-what-are-the-alternatives-to-the-refugee-camp-4db9abba86d5 Dadaab, a complex of camps for Somali refugees in eastern Kenya, was set up in 1992.

resources, advocate against discrimination in public services, and avoid the creation of parallel, refugee-specific structures.

▪ *Assistance provided to urban refugees should pursue a community-based approach that benefits local communities.* Refugees are not always the most vulnerable residents of urban areas, and therefore the needs of the urban poor among whom refugees live must be taken into account.

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