

CONVENTION PLUS: TARGETING DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE
TO ACHIEVE DURABLE SOLUTIONS FOR REFUGEES

(A discussion paper prepared by Denmark and Japan)

I. INTRODUCTION

1. This paper is intended to stimulate discussion on how development assistance could be better targeted to achieve durable solutions to refugee problems in the developing world. It is based upon the respective experiences and strategies of Denmark and Japan and proposes a way forward for further progress in the framework of the High Commissioner's Convention Plus initiative. Denmark and Japan strongly support the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' assertion that the strategic use of development assistance is an important element of any multilateral burden-sharing arrangements aimed at addressing refugee situations comprehensively, including primarily those of a protracted nature.

2. Assistance to refugees from conflict situations was originally viewed as a humanitarian responsibility to provide immediate protection and relief. Over the past decades, however, refugee situations have increasingly become protracted as a consequence of continued conflict or renewed outbreak of hostilities in post-conflict situations. This development has, on the one hand, stretched the capacity of UNHCR and other relief organizations and, on the other, highlighted the inadequacy of the response of the international community to meet the long-term needs of refugees, who have tended to fall into the so-called "gap" between traditional short-term humanitarian assistance and more long-term development assistance.

3. It would be wrong to state that the international community has not attempted to address this long-standing gap issue. Refugee-hosting countries in the developing world have contributed significantly to the international response as countries of first asylum. Donor countries have, to some extent, developed new strategies for transitional assistance, including more flexible funding mechanisms. At the multilateral level, humanitarian and development organizations have intensified discussions on how to improve planning, coordination and cooperation aimed at increasing the effectiveness of assistance to refugees and returnees.

4. UNHCR continues to play a key role in these efforts consistent with its mandate to promote durable solutions for refugees, including through its catalytic role aimed at strengthening the link between humanitarian and development organizations. New concepts like the "4Rs" (repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction) and "DAR" (Development Assistance for Refugees) have been developed and are being tested on a pilot-basis. A prominent example is the Zambia Initiative – which both Japan and Denmark support – where a host country agrees to include refugees in its long-term development plans. Other countries, like Uganda, have developed their own approaches, for example through self-reliance strategies, with the aim of improving the situation of refugees and paving the way for durable solutions.

5. The conceptual work behind these new developments and preliminary implementation are progressing and are expected to provide valuable lessons for further efforts and achievements. Despite all the good efforts to date it must be noted, however, that the processes are both limited in scope and inevitably time-consuming. Furthermore, the sheer magnitude of the continuing and, in some areas, increasing refugee problems clearly point to the need for additional and sustainable efforts.

6. The High Commissioner's Convention Plus initiative should be seen against this backdrop. The initiative seeks to develop comprehensive approaches, including generic and country-specific multilateral arrangements, aimed at realizing durable solutions for refugees through improved international responsibility and burden sharing.

7. At the High Commissioner's Forum meeting of 27 June 2003, Japan and Denmark offered and agreed to facilitate the work on targeting development assistance to achieve durable solutions for refugees within the Convention Plus framework. In a first phase in the run-up to the Forum meeting in March 2004, Japan, Denmark and UNHCR have held exploratory talks on the way forward, building on the two countries' own long-standing commitment and expertise in contributing to find durable solutions for refugees. The preliminary experiences indicate that there are considerable advantages in human terms as well as clear cost benefits to providing assistance to refugees in their regions of origin. These benefits accrue not only to the refugees, but also to host countries and communities, countries of origin and the international community at large.

II. JAPAN'S STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND OPERATIONAL APPROACH

8. The Japanese Government revised its ODA Charter in August 2003 in order to address new challenges confronting the international community. The new Charter places basic policies, such as self-help efforts of developing countries, promoting the perspective of human security, ensuring fairness for the socially vulnerable, and strengthening partnership and collaboration with the international community. Priority issues set out in the Charter are poverty reduction, sustainable growth, addressing global issues and peace keeping.

9. It is pivotal to Japan to assist the socially vulnerable, including refugees in host countries or returnees in countries of origin, in the context of human security, with due consideration to gender issues and inequalities in economic development among regions. Japan attaches great importance to the concept of human security when engaging in development assistance. To ensure that human dignity is maintained at all stages, the Japanese Government extends assistance for the protection and empowerment of individuals and believes that the community as a whole develops and benefits through this process. As a pertinent operational tool designed for supporting the United Nations agencies and programmes to assist the most vulnerable, Japan promotes a more strategic and integrated approach for further utilization of the Trust Fund for Human Security, which was founded by Japan in 1999.

10. It is also pivotal for Japan to assist returnees by bridging the gaps between humanitarian relief and rehabilitation efforts, in the context of peace-building in post-conflict situations. Assisting returnees in the initial reintegration phase is of particular importance, in order to consolidate peace in the regions of origin as well as to prevent returnees from being displaced once again. Japan has provided assistance, for example, for the 4Rs programme in Afghanistan under the "Ogata Initiative". Along the same lines, Japan has supported the reintegration of Angolan returnees through the Grant Aid for Conflict Prevention and Peace Building.

11. Another point of importance is the promotion of self-reliance through the DAR approach, which Japan expects will enable UNHCR to seek more effective, needs-based and responsible allocation and management of its limited resources in responding to other humanitarian challenges.

III. DENMARK'S POLICY ON TARGETING DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

12. In 2002 the Danish Government launched a new initiative in support of refugees and refugee-hosting communities, in recognition of the fact that the great majority of the world's refugees live in poor areas close to the refugees' own regions of origin. In May 2003 a strategy for activities in refugees' regions of origin was adopted. It aims to promote durable solutions for refugees by integrating refugees in development programmes through a combination of multilateral and bilateral activities in close cooperation with the Governments of the host countries. The strategy should also be seen as an element of the Danish Government's ongoing efforts to support conflict prevention.

13. In the multilateral field, the strategy emphasizes strengthening the link between humanitarian and development agencies within the United Nations family, for example, through the 4Rs approach in post-conflict situations with returnees, and by increasing self-reliance (DAR) for refugees in protracted refugee situations pending durable solutions. In the bilateral field, activities will build on existing development programmes and will, in accordance with Denmark's general poverty-reduction focus, target refugee-hosting areas, which tend to be the poorest border areas of the concerned developing countries. While the Danish embassies will be responsible for the bilateral activities, a high degree of local ownership will be encouraged.

14. In the 2003 budget of the Danish Foreign Ministry a new multi-annual budget line was established to support these activities. The budget line draws on development assistance funds separate from the continuing humanitarian budget lines. The first allocation from the new budget line amounts to some US\$ 35 million for the 3-year period from 2003 to 2005 and focuses on Zambia, the United Republic of Tanzania, Somalia and Sri Lanka, without excluding other possibilities.

IV. NEXT STEPS

15. In the next phase of the work on targeting development assistance to achieve durable solutions for refugees, Denmark and Japan would like to invite interested States and other key partners to join the process. In the first instance the aim should be to establish a limited number of more detailed case studies, which could be further developed into agreements on country-specific pilot programmes.

16. In such a scenario, the next steps could consist of the following:

- Identify a limited number of specific, protracted refugee situations, including some with not too remote prospects of a lasting and peaceful settlement of the conflict triggering the displacement.
- Explore the willingness of the countries of origin to cooperate in repatriation and reintegration programmes (4Rs).
- Explore the willingness of the neighboring host countries to include refugees in their own development plans and cooperate on self reliance programmes pending durable solutions (DAR).
- Identify interested donor countries willing to participate in new development assistance programmes for the benefit of both refugees and host communities.
- Identify interested UN and partner organizations, including NGOs, willing to take part in the integrated planning and implementation of such programmes.
- Establish a core group of the above-mentioned parties to sustain the process and possibly country-specific sub-groups.
- Ensure regular information to other interested parties.
- Ensure synergy with other Core Groups within the Convention Plus initiative.
- Identify within existing development plans (including UNDAF, PRSP and CHAPs), relevant sectors of cooperation for the benefit of refugees, returnees and host communities (health, education, water supply, farming, etc.)
- Develop area-based action plans and explore support for possible multilateral country-specific agreements on targeting of development aid.
- Explore support for a generic multilateral commitment on the strategic use of development assistance to solve refugee problems, building upon the above-mentioned action plans and situation-specific agreements.
- Initiate a study to establish links between development tools such as UNDAF/PRSP and humanitarian assistance tools, such as CAP/CHAP.