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Towards self sufficiency and integration: an historical evaluation of assistance programmes for Rwandese refugees in Burundi, 1962 - 1965

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Introduction

When refugees seek out the protection of another country, there is often the hope that they will be able to return home.¹ This is not always the case. More and more refugee situations around the world have become protracted; the needs of refugees caught in these unfortunate circumstances change as time passes.²

While camps seek to provide refugees with basic human rights and protection, life for those caught in protracted situations is different and requires alternative provision. One way of alleviating a protracted refugee situation is to encourage self-sufficiency and integration.

This paper tells the story of how several of the world's leading international organizations combined efforts and expertise in an attempt to implement a self-sufficiency and integration programme for Rwandese refugees and the local adjacent populations in Burundi in the 1960s. It explores and evaluates the programme, implemented in four refugee settlements, and identifies the factors which made it succeed and which made it fail; drawing out important lessons learned along the way.

The conceptual method for analysis used in this paper is historical evaluation. This type of evaluation is quickly finding relevance in the field of forced migration, as policy-makers and practitioners seek new, innovative ways to find durable solutions to protracted refugee situations and other problems facing this population. The primary documents on which this paper is based come from the UNHCR archives and the Betts Collection at the University of Oxford Refugee Studies Centre Library. These documents address issues that may not have been in the public domain at the time the events chronicled were happening. These documents show what went on behind the scenes as the programme was implemented; something second-hand sources are unable to fully accomplish.³

Although this is a preliminary analysis and the author continues to seek out additional sources, the paper actively attempts to raise issues that may prove to be of use in a present-day context. This is especially relevant as the idea of self-sufficiency and integration has, once again, been brought to the table as a potential solution to protracted refugee situations.⁴

¹ This study was commissioned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit as a part of its Protracted Refugee Situations Project. Special thanks to the UNHCR Archives and University of Oxford Refugee Studies Centre Library staffs for providing access and assistance. Thanks also to Dr Parul Patel, Dr Jeff Crisp, and Arafat Jamal for their editorial assistance and suggestions.

² Jamal, A, "Minimum standards and essential needs in a protracted refugee situation: a review of the UNHCR programme in Kakuma, Kenya," UNHCR Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit, EPAU/2000/05.

³ The limitation to using this type of document as a primary source is that document are sometimes missing, causing minor holes in the research.

⁴ See Crisp, J, "No solution in sight: the problem of protracted refugee situations in Africa," A working paper presented at the Forced Migration, International Security, and Humanitarian Assistance Conference, Center for Comparative Immigration Studies, University of California, San Diego, December 2002 (www.ccis-ucsd.org). See also Jacobsen, K, "The forgotten solution: local integration for refugees in developing countries," *New Issues in Refugee Research*, No. 45, UNHCR, July 2001 (www.unhcr.org).

Rwandese refugees in Burundi

In July 1962, the government of newly-independent Burundi formally requested UNHCR's assistance in developing plans to assist 40,000 Rwandese refugees who had sought asylum following alleged ethnic and political persecution. The approach the government sought was an eventual permanent settlement and integration of the refugees in eastern Burundi. However, this sort of approach was new to UNHCR. It had little experience on the African continent and, more importantly, in creating programmes involving the permanent settlement and integration of refugees into a first country of asylum. It realized that given the political situation in Rwanda, the chances of repatriation, in the short term, were very low.⁵

Thus, UNHCR built a programme with the aim of establishing a permanent solution to this protracted refugee situation. This was the first of its kind for UNHCR – and the organization realized its importance; for it sought a way to deal effectively with what were seen as “new refugee situations”⁶ appearing all over the African continent. The programme was implemented at four refugee settlements between 1962 and 1965: Kayongozi, Kigamba, Muramba, and Mugeru.

The first wave of refugees settled between July 1962 and April 1963. During this period, UNHCR and the League of Red Cross Societies (hereafter, “the League”) provided the necessary support for the refugee population, including food distribution, tools and seeds for cultivation. Both organizations, however, viewed their involvement in the settlements as temporary, the League looking to complete its mission by April 1963. Because of this position the implementation process was significantly rushed.

In April 1963, upon stabilization of the initial land settlement of refugees, the League concluded its mission, but UNHCR stayed to supervise the transfer of the programme to the Burundi government. However, a significant downturn in the economy left the government unable to assume responsibility, leaving UNHCR to lead the programme into its next stage alone.

UNHCR contracted the International Labour Organization (ILO) to set up an integration and zonal development project covering the refugee settlements and adjacent areas. This programme provided for the drainage of marshland, the reclamation of arable land, the construction of workshops and community centres, road building, improvement of livestock, and other related programmes. Despite these positive contributions, the programme never really got under way. Among the reasons were poor planning and low moral.

In December 1964, a second wave of refugees from Rwanda entered Burundi. Some 25,000 crossed the border into Tanzania, but had to settle in Burundi due to

⁵ Formal independence under a republican government came to Rwanda on 1 July 1962. Despite this, the war and ethnic violence which had plagued the country since 1959 would continue to do so well into the late 1960s. The violence over the period served as the catalyst for 300,000 ethnic Tutsi Rwandans to flee their country. Great Lakes region countries hosted many of the refugees, including over 50,000 finding protection in neighbouring Burundi in the early 1960s.

⁶ “New refugee situations” are defined in this context as refugee flows resulting from the decolonization process in Africa and the concomitant establishment new governments. The process was often extremely violent and ethnic persecution was particularly acute. It was the first time UNHCR had dealt with an issue of this sort.

overcrowding. Many of them settled in Bujumbura, Burundi's capital. The reaction of the Burundi government was to forcibly transport all of the male heads of families to a fourth settlement at Mugeru. This response was, as with the first wave, prompted by security concerns; the most threatening of which was armed refugee groups crossing back into Rwanda to fight. Mugeru was located on the eastern side of the country along the Tanzanian border and intended to be a permanent settlement. However, in the rush to transport the refugees, little long-term planning occurred. By the time the remainder of the 25,000 refugees arrived and settled, hunger, disease, and frustration were acute.

Within eight years of the programme's establishment, the four centres had declined significantly. In 1976, in an attempt to identify the causes, the International University Exchange Fund (IUEF) conducted an evaluation. The results gathered clearly demonstrated that, in less than a decade, the process had almost completely derailed. Why, after much investment by some of the world's leading aid organizations, had this occurred? What can be said for the programme as a whole? Did it really ever accomplish its goal of self-sufficiency and integration for the refugee population? What lessons can be, even partially, derived from this experience? Can those lessons assist policy-makers and practitioners today in their search for sustainable solutions to protracted refugee situations?

Kayongozi, Kigamba and Muramba settlements

By mid-July 1962, nearly 40,000 Rwandese refugees had fled into Burundi, and, feeling immense pressure, the government called upon the services of UNHCR as well as its neighbours, Tanganyika (which became Tanzania after 1964) and the Congo. On 10 July 1962, citing a risk to its security, the government successfully negotiated with Tanganyika to help it absorb some of the influx. The agreement stipulated that the Burundi government would only send new refugees to Tanganyika and would discourage refugees crossing over the border haphazardly on their own accord.⁷ It also negotiated successfully with the government of the Congo, which agreed to allow a percentage to settle within its borders.⁸ After the completion of both negotiations, Burundi was responsible for approximately 20,000 refugees.

Despite a reduction in the number of refugees, the government's burden remained quite large. It knew that the political situation in Rwanda would not end soon and it would have to provide the refugees with long-term assistance. Luckily, it had already learned from earlier experiences. Since 1959, there had been a steady stream of Rwandese refugees seeking asylum all over the Great Lakes region of Africa. And, because of this, the government had already designated three northern areas for permanent settlement. It hoped that the refugees would voluntarily settle in the areas and provided incentives, such as land for cultivation (2 hectares of land per family) and grazing rights. However, the Burundi government lacked technical and administrative expertise and called upon the UNHCR and the League to provide temporary assistance.

⁷ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/BUR[1]/70/Report/ "Refugee Situation in Burundi", 18 July 1962.

⁸ Such is an early instance of "burden sharing", although the official term had not yet been coined.

Initially, UNHCR and the League assisted with food distribution by providing seeds and tools to allow the refugees to start land cultivation. They also focused efforts on making the settlements attractive so that the refugees would be willing to relocate there.⁹ By mid-August 1962, the three settlements had received their first deliveries of agricultural implements for land clearance. And, within a month, 4000 refugees had begun to cultivate the land. In addition, reception areas were built and further land clearing begun.¹⁰

However, three problems emerged, threatening the success of the project. The first was reluctance on the part of the refugees to move to the new settlements. They voiced concern, citing superstition to go into areas recently cleared of thick jungle.¹¹ In response, the League asked for a few volunteers from among the refugees who would go to the three settlements of Kayongozi, Muramba, and Kigamba, to see the conditions themselves and to advise their people accordingly.¹² A second problem involved the refugees' incentive to work. Many wanted to return to Rwanda and saw the situation as temporary. Others did not wish to contribute to any community efforts. The third problem was the poor quality of the land. Most of the soil in the three settlements would not produce an adequate level of crops for subsistence.

Settlement issues

In November 1962, it was agreed by UNHCR, the League, and the Burundi government that the refugees should be regarded as future citizens of Burundi, their settlement should be made permanent and not provisional, and they should be treated exactly like Burundi citizens.¹³

Despite these decisions, the next few months (November 1962–March 1963) saw very little assistance for the refugees, except in the form of rations. The refugees, Tutsi pastoralists, did not know how to farm; some even rejected cultivation completely. There was also a lack of staff to provide the refugees with guidance. Further, from an administrative standpoint, there was no clear long-term plan in place for running the programme. Finally, in an effort to solve this problem, UNHCR's Director of Operations, Thomas Jamieson, put together a brief outlining the goal of the programme.

The purpose of our programme for the refugees in Burundi is to give them a chance to survive and to make it possible for them to provide for their own needs through their own efforts. However, it appears to me that we ought not only to enable these refugees to support themselves on a subsistence level, but should give them a chance to

⁹ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/BUR[1]/70/Report/ "Refugee Situation in Burundi", 18 July 1962.

¹⁰ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/BUR[1]/172/Interoffice Memorandum/ "My contacts with the FAO Programme Liaison Officer for Africa", 7 January 1963.

¹¹ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/BUR[1]/110/Summary Report/ "untitled", 17 September 1962.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/BUR[1]/150A/Interoffice Memorandum/ "Burundi Operational Budget", 8 November 1962.

improve their living conditions within the development of the country of asylum.¹⁴

To support this action, Jamieson used the UNHCR “good offices principle” meaning that UNHCR would not just provide refugees with temporary assistance, but would take an active interest in the problems that lay beyond that stage. A 1963 ExCom (Executive Committee of the UNHCR) summary outlines UNHCR’s position on the matter:

[The High Commissioner] feels that he should not hesitate to make available his good offices to the extent to which support going beyond the basic needs of the refugees could possibly be found for this purpose. Therefore, the High Commissioner considered it appropriate to draw up a supplementary programme, simultaneously with the basic programme [protection and basic humanitarian assistance].¹⁵

In clarifying this issue, UNHCR sought to ensure that the refugees would be able to live in a dignified way, though their own work. Additionally, this would keep the population from becoming dependent on permanent relief and allow the refugees a really free choice in the question of repatriation.¹⁶ However, UNHCR also realized that success would require a key change in a term it used frequently: “basic vital needs”. This term applied to immediate assistance and protection, and was not viewed as applicable to long-term solutions. Thus, UNHCR sought to re-define the term in a less rigid way. It did so by recognizing that those needs it had not considered as having immediate vital importance were still essential to consolidate the settlement of refugees and to give them an opportunity to improve their living conditions.¹⁷

To help in its efforts, UNHCR contracted the ILO to implement a zonal development programme that it hoped would be accomplished within a year. On 9 April 1963, officials from UNHCR and ILO met for the first time to discuss the programme. Although it was now participating in a programme designed to benefit both the refugee and local populations, UNHCR maintained that it was responsible for the refugees and not for economic development. This attitude was in line with its mandate, but carried with it a sense of uncertainty regarding its role.

Several other important issues were raised during the meeting regarding the “psychological” side of the programme’s establishment. They concerned the tribal way of living, which was of particular interest to ILO. Indeed, most of the refugee population in this case were Watutsi (Tutsi) and were not agriculturalists.

It was felt that their [Watutsi’s] outlook on farming would have to be changed, as up to now [prior to their displacement] the Bahutu [Hutu] servants worked the land for them. Now, as a result, they were out of

¹⁴ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/5A/36/Interoffice Memorandum/ “Burundi Operation”, 28 March 1963.

¹⁵ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/5A/2/EXCOM/ “Report of the Situation of Refugees from Rwanda”, 13 February 1963.

¹⁶ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/5A/6/Interoffice Memorandum/ “Attitude of the High Commissioner’s Office in New Refugee Situations”, 29 March 1963.

¹⁷ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/5A/2/EXCOM/ “Report of the Situation of Refugees from Rwanda”, 13 February 1963.

their normal environment and were confronted with the necessity of performing manual labour.¹⁸

The ILO agreed, recognizing the fundamental importance of taking into account the refugees' traditions, customs, and psychology. It made very clear that what was needed was not long exploratory work, but a planning mission which should come up with proposals for action as soon as possible.¹⁹ Thus, it was decided that Mr B Ghosh, of the ILO's Lagos (Nigeria) office, would conduct a mission to Burundi and make recommendations accordingly.

Ghosh was to prepare a plan for the economic and social development of the settlements in Burundi,²⁰ so that the refugees would be able to derive maximum benefits from the natural resources available to them by employing suitable techniques introduced through a programme of technical assistance.²¹ Importantly, it was noted in a pre-mission brief:

Both the plan and programme of technical assistance should be designed to fit in the national programmes of economic and social development of Burundi. They should, therefore, be considered as a first stage in the long-range economic development of this country, the stage when the settlements may be considered as having entered on the road to development along which further progress will depend upon their own efforts and the efforts of provincial and national authorities.²²

The situation in the settlements, however, was already very complicated. They were already experiencing setbacks, including tractors breaking down. Although a seemingly minor detail, this had a great impact on the programme's progress. Each settlement had been allocated one tractor. Upon delivery, one was already dysfunctional and could not be used; a second was only used once before it broke down; and a third, in Muramba, was available for use, but kept nearly 20 kilometres away from the fields needing cultivation. To make matters worse, not one of the organizations' staff present knew how to operate, much less fix, the equipment.

Because of these problems, UNHCR staff worried about the effects upon the settlements if the ILO plan was not in effect by the time the League departed, slated for June 1963. In an effort to keep the programme from stalling, UNHCR officer François Preziosi suggested that the basic principle of refugee operations should be to issue food rations to the refugees as wages for work accomplished and no longer distribute them as relief.²³ Preziosi also argued that each of the settlements (communities) should attempt to reach a state of self-governance as soon as possible: "The community should have its own elected leaders and its own work organization, it

¹⁸ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/5A/7/Note for the File/ "Meeting with Representatives of the ILO", 9 April 1963.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ He was also entrusted to carry out the same mission for similar settlements in Kivu. However, they are not covered in this paper.

²¹ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/5A/8/Brief/ "Project for the Economic and Social Development of the Rwanda Settlements in Kivu and Burundi", 10 April 1963.

²² Ibid.

²³ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/BUR/RWA[3]/298/Memorandum/ "Weekly Activities Letter", 26 May 1963.

should administer itself to the largest possible extent. Any outside help should be in the form of technical advice."²⁴

Initially Preziosi's recommendation concerning food as wages was not accepted. The ILO argued that it was in contradiction to the International Convention on the Payment of Wages.²⁵ Further, ILO viewed self-governance in each settlement as a very delicate matter, which might be regarded as compromising the sovereignty of the country.²⁶ However, since the situation in the settlements was not good, food for wages was eventually implemented.

Other recommendations came from UNHCR's Director of Operations, Thomas Jamieson, who wrote that it was essential to stimulate self-help methods, create confidence in future prospects and retain some control over trucks and tractors until development programmes could start.²⁷ Without doing this, he argued, it was likely that the refugees would fail to understand why they should be asked to work for food when previously they had received free rations.

Jamieson sought out the advice of Dr Hindley of the Alliance Protestante. Hindley was familiar with the situation and compared the settlements with the Nyamata settlement in Rwanda, where refugees had been resettled under Belgian protection. In that settlement, 15–20,000 refugees were resettled in May 1960. At the beginning, the refugees would not work, gradually, however, they were persuaded to cultivate their fields.

According to Hindley, the refugees in Nyamata cultivated far less than the refugees in the Burundi settlements. Some seed was distributed to them and they received food rations for one year. The refugees received 1–2 hectares of land per family. In May 1963, when Hindley visited the Nyamata last, the refugees were no longer being given rations. They produced more food than they needed and their complaint was that they could not sell the surplus.²⁸

As expected, on 30 June 1963, the League concluded its mission in Burundi. During the time it spent in the country, it assisted more than 19,000 refugees in the three settlements in receiving land, seeds and tools. A 25 June 1963 UNHCR interoffice memorandum stated:

The withdrawal of the League is based on the fact that the objectives of a limited settlement have by and large been achieved. The refugees have land under cultivation, more seeds and the necessary tools are available and in each centre a dispensary and simple schools are functioning. In some cases, the refugees have started to plant manioc

²⁴ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/BUR/RWA[3]/298/Memorandum/ "Weekly Activities Letter", 26 May 1963.

²⁵ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/5A/Letter/ "untitled", 5 July 1963.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/BUR/RWA[3]/299/Incoming Cable/ "untitled", 28 May 1963.

²⁸ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/BUR/RWA[3]/313C/Memorandum/ "Weekly Activities Letter", 10 July 1963.

on a community basis, which is an indication that they intend to stay in Burundi as manioc seeds take up to two years to yield crops.²⁹

By the time of the League's departure, the refugees in the three settlements had reaped one harvest of beans and sweet potatoes and were expecting a second by early 1964. This was achieved after Thomas Jamieson had defined the purpose of the programme, promoting the use of several experts to assist the refugees in their cultivation. Their land holdings had also been increased to attain the necessary size for self-sufficiency and to permit the planting of some cash crops.³⁰ As this was occurring, Ghosh (of the ILO) submitted his report on 10 July 1963.

The Ghosh report

Ghosh's report was based entirely on the position that both the local and refugee populations would need to benefit equally from the programme for it to succeed. He argued that while refugee settlements must be planned on an economically viable basis, it is neither possible nor desirable to conceive of them as isolated and fully self-contained economic or social units.³¹

The solutions to the various basic problems of the individual and community life of the refugees cannot and will not always be found within relatively narrow limits of the present settlements. There are many activities or projects of special importance to the settlements, which call for, or can be more effectively undertaken with the active participation of the populations in the adjacent or neighbouring areas.³²

The activities and projects Ghosh referred to were aimed at addressing the issues of ethnicity, tribal influence, and standard of living of both populations. Both populations were ethnically different, and, in the struggle to keep their identity, tribal influence would be likely to yield great influence in the settlements.

With regard to the standard of living issue, the Rwandese refugee population had enjoyed a high standard of living prior to settling in Burundi, but for the local inhabitants in the areas adjacent to the settlements standards were relatively low. In these circumstances, argued Ghosh, if the proposed development programme aimed exclusively to improve the social and economic conditions of the refugee groups, it could potentially be a source of serious political difficulties and social tension.³³

However, there were indications that social tension was not a factor in some of the settlements. In fact, in certain areas, the refugee and local populations were actively collaborating in a number of economic activities and community projects. One such

²⁹ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/BUR/RWA[3]/329/Interoffice Memorandum/ "Rwanda Refugees in Burundi", 25 June 1963.

³⁰ UNHCR Archives, "UNHCR Reports: a monthly newsletter published by the UNHCR", No.25, July-August 1963.

³¹ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/5A/40A/Report/ "Report of the Planning Mission on Settlement of Rwanda Refugees in the Congo and Burundi", 10 July 1963.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

example was the sharing of seeds and land, and construction of roads and schools.³⁴ Success was also seen in the fact that the makeshift schools and medical posts, set up within the refugee settlements, were open to the local population, living in the adjacent areas.³⁵ These collaborations, however, were only happening in a very few cases and were not significant enough to say that the settlements were becoming truly integrated.

Ghosh's summary of recommendations came under three major headings:

1. new communities must have a viable economic basis
2. the importance of an integral and balanced approach
3. the role of social promoters

New communities must have a viable economic basis

Economic viability or satisfactory land allocation was an essential prerequisite in the sound and long-term development of the communities concerned.³⁶ In Burundi, pressure on the land was relatively high and the soil less fertile, and alternative measures (e.g. soil improvement and more intensive methods of cultivation, mixed with farming and reclamation of swampland) could have proved especially useful.³⁷

The importance of an integral and balanced approach

In order to make an effective impact, the programme had to cover all the major aspects of individual and community life: economic activities, particularly agricultural and handicraft production; health, education and training; psychological attitudes and social habits; joint or cooperative action and various forms of social organization.³⁸ Importantly, Ghosh argued, the refugee settlements or similar rural communities were particularly vulnerable to various types of social imbalance resulting from too great or too little an importance given to activities in a particular field.³⁹

The role of social promoters

The introduction of change, implicit in a new development programme, especially when achieved through concentrated outside efforts or sudden pressures, might easily have upset the existing harmony and structure of these communities. Because of this, Ghosh argued that the population might feel obliged to submit to such "imposition,"

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/5A/40A/Report/ "Report of the Planning Mission on Settlement of Rwanda Refugees in the Congo and Burundi", 10 July 1963.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

but the development programme, in that event, would hardly leave any lasting results. By the effective and rational use of social promoters such dangers could be avoided.⁴⁰

On 11 July 1963, UNHCR and ILO officials met to discuss UNHCR's role and the funding of the programme. It was estimated that it would take about six months to implement Ghosh's recommendations. Therefore, it was decided that UNHCR would provide funds for the programme during the rest of the year (1963) and that ILO would include provision for additional funds in support of the programme in 1964.⁴¹ UNHCR's responsibility for the programme would end in 1964. After that point, if ILO required assistance it could call upon the good offices of UNHCR which might consider the request sympathetically, although at this time, no promises could be made.⁴²

Evaluations of the three settlements

In September 1963, officials from the UNTAB (United Nations Technical Assistance Board) paid a two-week visit to the three settlements. This was the first visit and assessment conducted by an agency not directly involved with the programme. Its findings indicated that the programme was in a critical state. In Kayangozi, several fields were examined. Despite satisfactory soil conditions, none of the fields had produced enough to achieve self-sufficiency. UNTAB recommended improving the soil to reach full productivity to obtain a good bean harvest.⁴³ The refugees who had been given land, had up to this stage not received appropriate training. As a result, valuable time had been. On a related matter, the tractor for the settlement was still out of commission at the time of the visit, further aggravating the situation.

The diet of the refugees was also a concern. Little land had been cultivated and lack of diverse crops created health problems. The nurse at the settlement dispensary reported many cases of stomach pains, due to a unrelieved diet of flour-paste, and night blindness resulting from a lack of vitamin A.⁴⁴ UNTAB recommended broadening the types of crops being planted.

In Kigamba, it was found that despite increased in efforts in persuading the refugees to cultivate their plots of land, there was still reluctance. Matters were made worse by the fact that, as in Kayangozi, there was no tractor to assist with the process. Further, since the amount of rations per family had been reduced, refugees were even more reluctant to plant the bean seeds, which had been provided to them for that purpose. Instead, they were eating them and, in individual interviews, not one family among those asked would admit to possessing any bean seeds.⁴⁵

UNTAB found the situation in the Muramba settlement unique. According to field notes, the refugee leaders at Muramba stated amiably but unequivocally that their people were there only until such time as they could return to Rwanda under their

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/5A/51/Interoffice Memorandum/ "untitled", 11 July 1963.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/BUR/RWA[3]/341/Field Notes/ "Remarks on Visits to Kayongozi, Kigamba, and Muramba", 6 September 1963.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

mwami (monarch).⁴⁶ The difference in attitude could be accounted for because Muramba is close to the northern border and thus more exposed to political currents from Rwanda, whereas the other centres are separated by the vast Ruvuvu Valley.⁴⁷

In its evaluation, UNTAB expressed a concern for including the local Burundi population. UNTAB observed that it would be useful to know whether local inhabitants might be included in projects from the very outset, and whether some programmes might be drawn up specifically on their behalf – coffee or banana plantations, for example, in which the refugees themselves showed no initial interest.⁴⁸ Further, UNTAB noted that if a serious effort were made on such works among the Burundi with eventual success, others might be moved to emulate it.⁴⁹

A month later, the Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan visited the settlements. Sadruddin was worried that UNHCR and ILO were prematurely phasing out much needed relief measures. In his field notes, he mentioned that although the 20,000 refugees, grouped in three settlements, were cultivating the land and thus laying the basis for self-sufficiency, many of them in the meantime did not have enough to eat.⁵⁰ Sadruddin wrote,

The crux of the difficulty lay not in a shortage of rations, but in a temporary breakdown in transportation, a service which the Burundi government agreed to take over following the withdrawal of the League in July 1963. What is difficult to repair in such a situation, however, is the all-important element of morale. Material assistance is meaningful only when the recipients feel they are working hard and trying to establish themselves.⁵¹

To help solve this, Sadruddin met with the United Nations Operation in the Congo (UNOC) Senior Community Development Consultant, Ernest Grigg. Grigg was responsible for the creation of self-help projects for refugees in the Congo and Sadruddin sought his assistance in setting up a similar set of projects in the Burundi settlements. Such projects, it was felt, could help build moral amongst the refugee population. Grigg informed Sadruddin that the programme could be conceived as a series of self-contained projects with a specific objective and a foreseeable terminal date.⁵²

Under this programme, the UNOC was prepared to assist any organization (governmental, non-governmental, private agency or company) to help the people in a selected region to resolve special problems of development and generally raise their standard of living.⁵³ Grigg noted, however, that the selection of an area to be assisted should be based upon the fact that the individuals themselves have demonstrated their

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/BUR/RWA[3]/341/Field Notes/ "Remarks on Visits to Kayongozi, Kigamba, and Muramba", 6 September 1963.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ UNHCR Archives, "UNHCR Reports", No.27, Nov. 1963.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/BUR/RWA[3]/66/Letter/ "untitled", 18 October 1963.

⁵³ Ibid.

willingness and interest in the project by making available whatever resources they have and be willing to work for themselves.⁵⁴

The decline of the three settlements

In November 1963, shortly after Sadruddin and Grigg's meeting, the political situation in Burundi with regard to the refugee population worsened: refugees in Muramba attempted to return by force to Rwanda. Fighting broke out before they crossed the border, but had lasting consequences on the programme's progress. Because of the situation, the overall programme came to a standstill, including all projects aimed at the consolidation of the economic situation and the improvement of social conditions for the Rwandese refugees residing in the three settlements.⁵⁵

Further, Ghosh's recommendations were placed in serious jeopardy. The Burundi government had begun to rethink the entire programme's future. Among the issues it re-considered was whether the settlements would indeed be long term or whether repatriation and resettlement to other countries of asylum would be better solutions.⁵⁶ The ILO and UNHCR, in response, sent a team to investigate the situation in all three settlements in January 1964. From their mission goals, it is evident that they were also unsure about the programme, as they wished to determine the minimum conditions (administrative, economic and financial) under which implementation of the zonal development project, as originally conceived, would be feasible.⁵⁷

Following their mission, ILO decided to scale back the zonal development programme. Among the changes: the UNHCR self-help projects would not be implemented and the would take over the programme completely.⁵⁸ In the meantime, another crop would be planted, with the assistance of the two organizations, which would be ready by July 1964.

By March 1964, the economic situation of Burundi was even worse, prompting the government to inform UNHCR that the refugee population could not be given the same treatment as the local population. This hindered the efforts of integration, placing a boundary between the refugees and the local population. An illustration of this was the government citing that it was not possible to explain to the Burundi population why their produce could not be bought while free food was being given to the refugees.⁵⁹

Hunger in the camp became increasingly acute. Although a crop was on the way, it was unlikely to be enough, as the refugees had too little land under cultivation.⁶⁰ To compound the situation, rations had been cut significantly after the transition phases of the programme had ended. UNHCR feared that the refugees would not have

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/BUR/RWA[5]/715A/Memorandum/ "Projects for Old Rwandese Refugees in Burundi", 23 March 1964

⁵⁶ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/81/BUR/MUG[1]/84/Letter/ "untitled", 12 December 1963.

⁵⁷ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/81/BUR/MUG[1]/91/Letter/ "untitled", 8 January 1964.

⁵⁸ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/81/BUR/MUG[2]/92/Memorandum/ "untitled", 17 April 1965.

⁵⁹ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/BUR/RWA[5]/718/Memorandum/ "Projects for Old Rwandese Refugees in Burundi", 8 April 1964.

⁶⁰ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/BUR/RWA[5]/760/Memorandum/ "Report from VSO Team", 25 April 1964.

enough food to exist.⁶¹ Reports from Muramba indicated the health of the refugees was deteriorating; many children were developing whooping cough and other deficiency diseases.⁶²

By June 1964, it was painfully evident that the original goals of the programme would not be able to be implemented. Many of the crops had dried up and there was no longer sufficient food for the refugees. UNHCR and ILO realized that permanent settlement would not be achieved.⁶³ ILO's plan for implementing the programme had been delayed so many months that there were now additional problems in financing, which could not be solved. Although some parts of the settlements achieved permanent settlement by the refugees, there was not the sense of community that had originally been intended. Further, the local population never really benefited in any way from the programme. This population was essentially forgotten.

For the next six months, rations were provided to keep the population stable. Neither self-sufficiency nor integration was ever established. By January 1965, refugees were leaving the settlements, especially Kigamba, because of the food situation.⁶⁴ Those who did remain still received aid, but conditions really never improved.

A fourth settlement: Mugera

Even after independence, fighting in Rwanda continued and thousands of new refugees fled. Many sought protection in Tanzania and other camps in different regions of Burundi, but because of overcrowding, they moved to Bujumbura. By January 1965 there were 25,000 new refugees in the capital. Once again, the Burundi government was faced with a crisis. Reports from United Nations observers in Rwanda told of horrific cases of genocide; the estimated numbers of victims exceeding 10,000.⁶⁵ The Burundi government's only solution was to create a fourth settlement with the hope that it could sustain the new refugee population.

However, the political tension escalated with the assassination of Burundi Prime Minister Pierre Ngendandumwe on 15 January 1965. A Hutu, Ngendandumwe was assassinated by a Tutsi refugee, Gonsalve Muyenzi. Muyenzi worked for the United States Embassy and claimed he received instructions to carry out the assassination for 1.5 million Burundi Francs.⁶⁶ The United States Ambassador denied the charge. Following the arrest, Burundi soldiers seized 1.5 tons of arms and ammunitions at another refugee camp, Murore, and 35 refugees were arrested in the operation.⁶⁷

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/BUR/RWA[6]/797/Memorandum/ "Report of the VSO Teams", 22 May 1964.

⁶³ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/BUR/RWA[6]/857/Memorandum/ "Report of the ISO VSO Team", 29 June 1964.

⁶⁴ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/81/BUR/MUG[2]/107/Cable/ "Message from US Mission", 28 April 1965.

⁶⁵ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/BUR/RWA[4]/598/Cable/ "untitled", 13 January 1964.

⁶⁶ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/BUR/RWA[7]/1078A/Memorandum/ "Composition of the New Burundi Government", 15 January 1965.

⁶⁷ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/BUR/RWA[7]/1085/Memorandum/ "Interview with the Prime Minister", 30 January 1965.

The situation in Burundi grew extremely tense as rumours of a civil war ran through the country. The two opposing groups comprised those who wanted to overthrow the monarchy and establish a people's republic, and those who preferred the status quo. The first group was Tutsis, while the second was Hutus and those Tutsis who remained loyal to their *mwami*.⁶⁸ Interestingly, the same day as the assassination, the People's Republic of China broke off diplomatic ties with Burundi.⁶⁹

Forced resettlement

On 27 January 1965, the Burundi government met with UNHCR. The new prime minister was interested in moving the refugees from Bujumbura to the new settlement of Mugeru as soon as possible. He mentioned that two conditions would be required to ensure the success of the resettlement scheme: the speed and secrecy of the operation.⁷⁰ Little did UNHCR know, but the "secrecy" component would cause a great deal of trouble for the settlement.

On 15 February 1965, the Burundi government decided to transfer the heads of Rwandese non-settled families to Mugeru, citing security as the main reason. Family members would join them after the building of huts was completed.⁷¹ The prime minister of Burundi contacted UNHCR, wanting to know whether such an operation based on national security grounds was compatible with the spirit of the refugee conventions.⁷² UNHCR informed him that the matter of internal security was entirely a matter for the Burundi government, but from a humanitarian angle, the operation appeared to be precipitative and would cause hardship for which the Burundi government might be blamed.⁷³

The prime minister replied that the Burundi government had evidence that attacks by refugees on Rwanda were planned for 25 February 1965 and of a planned assassination of Hutu ministers in the Burundi government. Further, the prime minister informed UNHCR that various measures had been taken within the limited means of the Burundi government to reduce hardship to a minimum, but strongly appealed through UNHCR to the international community to send relief to urgently assist the Burundi government in the fourth settlement (Mugeru).⁷⁴

In the early morning hours of 18 February 1965, Burundi troops surrounded the refugee quarters in Bujumbura and the first group of 600 heads of family left the capital in 17 trucks without incident.⁷⁵ The next day, another 30 departed to Mugeru. It was estimated that during the two-day operation, 2000 heads of families were transported to Mugeru. However, because the refugees were forced to go, quite a

⁶⁸ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/BUR/RWA[7]/1078A/Memorandum/ "Composition of the New Burundi Government", 15 January 1965.

⁶⁹ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/BUR/RWA[7]/1085/Memorandum/ "Interview with the Prime Minister", 30 January 1965.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/81/BUR/MUG[1]/6/Incoming Cable/ "untitled", 19 February 1965.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/81/BUR/MUG[1]/8/Incoming Cable/ "untitled", 20 February 1965.

number of them escaped the control of their guards and scattered through the country and/or crossed the border into Tanzania.”⁷⁶

An appeal went out from UNHCR for food aid to support the refugees arriving at Mugeru, as the refugees had no possibility of supplementing their rations with locally grown products until they were settled.⁷⁷ The Burundi government was seen as acting in haste, without any preliminary planning.⁷⁸ Further, it was felt that the Burundi government might have ultimately moved all Rwandese refugees out of the city had it not been for the disruption to economic activity in Bujumbura, where most of businesses relied on Rwandese clerical staff.⁷⁹

The development of Mugeru

On 10 March 1965, the first group of experts arrived at Mugeru to assess the situation. Representatives from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) conducted a brief survey of the soil at the site and noted in their preliminary conclusion that:

It must be appreciated that the region is a difficult one, and that any settlement will require a great deal of assistance, both as regards advice and encouragement for their (refugees’) agricultural techniques, and supplies of food, seeds, etc during the period of years when they are getting established.⁸⁰

Despite this news, it was decided that the soil was adequate for beans, bananas and groundnuts. The FAO recommended that at least 2 hectares per family would be required, which were granted by the Burundi government. Seeds and tools were immediately provided, as well as support from UNHCR personnel. Rations were also increased and support brought in from the World Food Programme (WFP) in Rome. The United States also got involved by authorizing a food donation worth over \$910,000, and stressed the idea of settling the Rwandese refugees away from the Rwandan border as an important contribution towards internal and regional stability.⁸¹ It also agreed to provide assistance to the Burundi government if the project could include elements of the local population in the resulting benefits.⁸² On 13 April 1965 agreement was reached that it would be feasible but difficult to settle all 25,000 refugees in Mugeru.⁸³

With regard to the structure of the settlement, UNHCR hoped that it would avoid having a non-governmental agency in charge of Mugeru, which, it believed, would create a state within a state and relieve the various ministers of the Burundi

⁷⁶ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/81/BUR/MUG[1]/21A/Report/ “Rwandese Refugees Crossing the Burundi Border”, 15 March 1965.

⁷⁷ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/81/BUR/MUG[1]/8/Incoming Cable/ “untitled”, 20 February 1965.

⁷⁸ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/81/BUR/MUG[1]/17/Meeting Notes/ “Meeting with Col. Henniquiau”, 5 March 1965.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/81/BUR/MUG[1]/17B/Report/ “Brief Study of the Soils in Mugeru”, 10 March 1965.

⁸¹ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/81/BUR/RWA[1]/78/Report/ “WFP”, April 1965.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/81/BUR/RWA[1]/80/Report/ “untitled”, 13 April 1965.

government of their respective responsibilities.⁸⁴ However, because of the government's lack of experience and the problems encountered in the first three settlements, UNHCR believed the presence of one or more coordinators on the ground would be an essential prerequisite for the success of the plan.⁸⁵

Plans for building up infrastructure, including roads, water supply, agricultural needs, and social centres were agreed on 16 April 1965. The Burundi government received aid from UNHCR to build a system to ensure clean water for the settlement, and from UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) and several faith-based organizations, funding for agriculture and social centres.⁸⁶ The Burundi government provided the necessary support for a new medical dispensary where the refugees could obtain basic healthcare. The League also returned to Burundi to provide administrative support.

In addition to the planned infrastructure, UNHCR, now executive agency of Mugeru, sought to define the settlement's purpose. UNHCR officer Jacques Cuenod wrote to the High Commissioner on 21 April 1965:

Mugeru is first and foremost a long-term rural development project from which not only the refugees but also the local population will benefit. It should therefore be conceived as such from the initial stages, notwithstanding the fact that it has to start with a relief operation merged with a quick land settlement phase. The problem created by the settlement of 25,000 persons in Mugeru will not be entirely solved once UNHCR, and possibly the League, have completed their task.⁸⁷

Nonetheless, plans for the settlement of all 25,000 refugees were carried out. The plans noted that in order for Mugeru to transform into a viable agricultural area, it would require a formidable effort, not only on the part of the refugees but also on the part of the Burundi government and the organizations that had declared themselves prepared to render assistance to the government to that end.⁸⁸

It is essential that the executing agency appointed can make available the necessary professional skill in agricultural development. This point cannot be too strongly emphasized being the decisive condition for the successful execution of the project.⁸⁹

By May 1965, the settlement had progressed into a full agricultural settlement. Aiding the growth was the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), which implemented several successful youth centres, and the German government which donated DM 1 million.⁹⁰ The German government was interested in the implementation of a

⁸⁴ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/BUR/RWA[7]/1042A/Memorandum/ "Visit from Mr. Jan S F van Hoogstraten", 24 November 1964.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/81/BUR/MUG[2]/90/Memorandum/ "Estimated Budget for Mugeru", 16 April 1965.

⁸⁷ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/81/BUR/MUG[2]/98/Memorandum/ "Executive Agency for Mugeru", 21 April 1965.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/81/BUR/MUG[2]/112A/Memorandum/ "Further German Contribution", 6 May 1965.

programme that contained “pilot” elements, i.e. something which was new for the area. Mugeru fulfilled this requirement.

With the relative success of the programme, the FAO assumed the role of executive agency in May 1965. The organization, along with UNHCR, UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), ILO and WFP worked at strengthening and developing agriculture in the settlement. In addition, they provided projects for the maintenance and development of communal facilities including water supply, road improvement, and communal building.

However, political problems in Burundi blocked the start-up of new projects. At the time they were due to begin, the Burundi government was in a state of flux. The government had changed earlier in the year and the king had yet to appoint a new prime minister. Political tension in the country increased because, as noted previously, Hutus and Tutsis were at odds. The Tutsi still hoped to end the monarchy, while the Hutu clung to the status quo. This caused France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States to stop the aid they had been sending through the various United Nations agencies into the settlement. The reason they gave was the principle that linking bilateral aid projects with the settlement was still thought to be too political.⁹¹ Despite this, the FAO continued to work in close collaboration with the other organizations to expand the programme, with limited success.

The last documents from the UNHCR archives are from May 1965. As highlighted above, Burundi was in a state of flux, which was negatively affecting efforts in Mugeru. Despite this, Mugeru did prove to be the most successful of the four settlements. It endured for another decade and was sustained by a variety of non-governmental and other international organizations. It is likely that documents, from other sources, such as the Burundi government, exist which may provide additional details of the settlement’s activities.

Did the settlements succeed?

From 1969 to 1971, David Moore, of the International University Exchange Fund (IUEF) resided in Mugeru. In 1976, Moore conducted an evaluation of the four settlements in order to judge their success. The methodology of his evaluation consisted largely of conversations with UNHCR staff, missionaries representing various programmes, and, most importantly, refugees with a variety of experiences and backgrounds. He discussed at length the condition of the settlements and the different issues that arose following their creation some 15 years previously.

The state of the settlements

Kigamba and Kayongozi settlements were found to be nearly deserted. The bitter lesson of Kayongozi, Moore noted, was that the land was not productive for much apart from grass for grazing and that it had been gradually abandoned by the refugees.⁹² Making this point even more poignant is the simple fact that such

⁹¹ UNHCR Archives, HCR/15/81/BUR/MUG[2]/126/Cable/ “untitled”, 21 May 1965.

⁹² University of Oxford Refugee Studies Centre, Betts Collection, Box 23/Document 221/ “Report on Rwandese Refugees in Burundi”, November 1976.

information was known and largely ignored from the time of the inception of the programme. Experts like Ghosh from the ILO strongly recommended a thorough soil analysis to determine if the land was sustainable, and if not to make alternative recommendations. This was never fully done and, as a result, time, effort, and funds were wasted – and the community was not able to achieve full self-sufficiency.

However, Moore's evaluation does point to the fact that at least some of the land proved fertile over the long-term. These spots turned out to be marshland, cultivated in close collaboration between a few Rwandese and local Barundi.⁹³ This collaboration, although small, shows some success with regard to the original intent of the programme. One of the goals was to facilitate integration for the refugees, and opportunities for the local Barundi population.

By the time of Moore's evaluation, Kigamba settlement had also fallen into near disarray. Perhaps the worst problem was the fact that, since the population had begun to dwindle, wild pigs ravaged the strongest crops. Moore noted that, after speaking with some who remained, many had become convinced that their future lay elsewhere – and, as a result, they planned on moving to Mugeru settlement, Tanzania, and Bujumbura.⁹⁴

Muramba's problem lay in the fact that it had been overcrowded since inception. This led to heavy exploitation of the land, causing poor crop yields. By 1976, the food shortages had become acute, despite people committing to stay.⁹⁵

The fourth settlement, Mugeru, was found by Moore to be plagued by malaria, endemic intestinal parasites, and amoebic dysentery. This was due largely to the malfunctioning of the water system.⁹⁶ However, Moore noted optimistically that people were coming back in small numbers from Tanzania and other places to re-settle in Mugeru.⁹⁷ Mugeru had produced good crops, resulting in the local population buying beans from the refugees on a regular basis. However, except for one or two isolated cases there was little or no social interaction between the refugee and local populations.

Naturalization

Because repatriation was not an option in this protracted refugee situation, UNHCR maintained pressure on the Burundi government to grant naturalization to those Rwandese refugees who sought it. Moore found that, at the time of his evaluation, UNHCR had not been successful. However, there was still the hope that eventually the government would allow refugees to move from the status of "foreigner" to that of Burundi citizen.⁹⁸ Moore noted,

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ University of Oxford Refugee Studies Centre, Betts Collection, Box 23/Document 221/ "Report on Rwandese Refugees in Burundi", November 1976.

There seems to be no haste on the part of most refugees to change their nationality, not knowing what will happen in the next ten years or where they may eventually end up. They are conscious, I feel, that their position is tenuous in an ever-changing continent. In the meantime, Rwandese employees in the city hold down good office jobs, but for how long? Employers are told how many Rwandese they can engage in any given year and there are cases of the phasing out of Rwandese as soon as there are Barundi capable of replacing them. This, as you can imagine, is the cause of much bitterness.⁹⁹

Conclusions

Self-sufficiency and integration could not be successfully implemented within the wider scope of development in Burundi. Although all involved realized its importance and saw it as the goal of their programme, the living standards of both populations did not significantly improve. Many of the refugees, as noted in Moore's evaluation, actually became worse off than when they were originally settled. By the time of the evaluation in 1976 Burundi was hosting over 60,000 refugees, making the situation extremely difficult for both the organizations and government. The refugees continued to receive aid, but many sought their future elsewhere.

The problem of land size

The first and foremost reason for failure was land – the poor quality of the soil and the meagre land allocation. This meant that refugees could only produce subsistence crops for themselves and their families. Any attempt at providing a viable economic basis for the settlements was lost. Land that was deemed adequate was mostly marshland and that needed reclamation. This was not accomplished until several years into the programme. In Moore's evaluation, it was found that by 1976, it was this reclaimed marshland which housed most of the refugee population. The marshland was cultivated and produced crops, but not enough to provide for the entire settlement.

Poor harvests

The problem of providing appropriate food rations went hand-in-hand with the lack of land and failed crops. It was assumed by the organizations that the refugees would be successful in cultivating their land. However, many were not and even those who did produce a crop did not have enough to feed their families. This was the situation in the first three settlements, where rations were prematurely cut-off. Thomas Jamieson and François Preziosi recommended using rations as wages, which, it was thought, would provide the incentive for the refugees to cultivate their land and keep them from becoming dependent. However, since the quality of the soil was poor, training was inadequate and equipment, such as tractors, was not functioning, this was not realistic.

Although UNHCR Deputy High Commissioner Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan noted this, nothing was done. Acute hunger set in and many of the refugees moved to other

⁹⁹ Ibid.

places. In fact, all four settlements experienced large out-migrations in their early years. Some lost as much as 90 per cent of their population as a result of poor soils, a desire to be reunited with family members located in other asylum countries, reluctance to become farmers, and a lack of opportunity for those refugees from urban areas.¹⁰⁰

Inadequate aid

All of the above problems raise the issue of appropriate levels of aid for the refugee population. None of the organizations involved ever established what constituted an appropriate level. Because of this, the four settlements all received, at best, minimal support, especially for dispensaries and schools. When UNHCR and the League first became involved in the early settlements, they viewed their roles as temporary. As soon as the refugees could achieve temporary self-sufficiency and the Burundi government could take over administration, they would depart. This mindset affected the first three settlements the most; as all of them were still dependent upon food aid well into the mid-1970s, when Moore conducted his evaluation.

No viable economic base

Because the correct level of aid, including effective vocational training and opportunities for the refugee population, was never established, neither was a viable economic base. With low crop yields and restrictions on the selling of cash crops, there was really no way that the settlements could ever become economic through agriculture alone. Other opportunities provided, such as carpentry and a mechanics shop, were under-utilized. These opportunities allowed the refugees to work on their skills, but did not offer a means to allow them to participate in the local economy.

Integration not achieved

Integration of the refugee population with the local population never stood a chance. Although the organizations and the Burundi government agreed that they would work toward the refugees becoming citizens, naturalization never happened. Further, the local population did not really benefit in any way from the programme. There were only a few reported cases of the two populations interacting, and even fewer of mutual economic gain. Only in Mugeru, after failed crops in other parts of Burundi forced the local population to rely on cash crops such as beans and other staples produced in the settlement, did the refugees get a chance to participate in the Burundi economy.

Because the refugees were not able to integrate fully into the local economy, many of them eventually moved back to Bujumbura and other cities around the Great Lakes region in search of employment. In due course many took up administrative jobs, at which they were quite successful. Although this trend occurred and the refugees became self-supporting, no credit for it can be given to the settlements. The refugees were given no choice but to move on.

¹⁰⁰ Van der Meeren c.1969. "Burundi: Project Rural Integrated Development of Cankuzo-Mosso Area", preliminary draft, UNDP/FAO/AGS/FSR/BD17.

The Burundi government negated its responsibility

The Burundi government's inability to take responsibility for the administration of the settlements harmed the programme significantly. The settlements could not stand solely on the aid given by organizations, such as UNHCR, rather, they really needed the government to be the primary provider of services such as public works and infrastructure provision.

Other lessons learned

UNHCR and the other organizations involved did learn from the experience. Policies on the need to provide infrastructure early in a settlement's life were developed. Such inputs indicate permanence and encourage those refugees who value education and other services to remain in the settlement rather than to settle spontaneously. Developing the administration plan for settlements – preferring to work with agencies, usually NGOs, which are able to remain with a project through to its completion rather than only working on the relief stage or settlement stage – was another outcome.¹⁰¹

Perhaps the most important issue this paper seeks to shed light on is the question of self-sufficiency. The settlements in Burundi were the first time UNHCR grappled with this solution and, in doing so, struggled to clarify just what it meant by “self-sufficiency”. Using present-day definitions of the concept as a benchmark, *full* self-sufficiency was not reached, for the settlements could not stand on their own without supplies of food aid.

In some instances, *partial* self-sufficiency was reached, since some of the refugee populations chose to remain and grew crops successfully enough to sustain themselves. Post-case study literature notes that all four settlements achieved self-sufficiency by the late 1960s.¹⁰² This is misleading and warrants further investigation.

In determining whether this type of solution is appropriate for present-day protracted refugee situations, practitioners should explore further the evolution of the concept of self-sufficiency, identify additional case studies in which it was used as a solution, and even expand upon present definitions.

¹⁰¹ Stein, B. “Refugee Integration and Older Refugee Settlements in Africa”, a paper presented at the 1990 meeting of the American Anthropological Association, New Orleans.

¹⁰² “Older Refugee Settlements in Africa”, Refugee Policy Group, Washington, DC, 1985, p.108.

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