

The State of The World's Refugees in search of solutions

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4 Promoting development



A Somali refugee child at Daror, Ethiopia, June 1991
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'Armed conflict and humanitarian emergencies fill the headlines and consume our energies, but underlying many of these tragic events is the silent crisis of underdevelopment: chronic and growing poverty, mounting population pressures and unemployment, and widespread environmental destruction.'

As this statement by the UN Secretary-General suggests, the wars and human rights abuses which provoke refugee movements are often rooted in longer-term social, economic and ecological processes. It is no coincidence that many of the largest population displacements of recent years have taken place in countries where standards of living are stagnant or declining.

Development problems also represent a significant obstacle in the search for solutions to the problem of human displacement. Refugees cannot easily settle down and lead productive lives in countries where the infrastructure has collapsed, the land has become infertile and prices are spiralling upwards. Indeed, the sudden arrival of a large refugee population can add substantially to these difficulties. Nor can refugees be expected to go home and reintegrate in their own society if conditions there are just as - if not more - difficult than those in their country of asylum.

Strategies intended to avert or resolve refugee problems cannot be expected to succeed if they fail to address these issues. In the Secretary-General's words, 'as efforts to respond to acute crises through peacekeeping, humanitarian relief and refugee assistance grow larger, so must our efforts to respond to the silent crisis through the promotion of lasting development.'

Development and displacement

The relationship between development and displacement has changed substantially in the five decades since the creation of the United Nations. In the early years of the organization, the rapid growth of the international economy made a significant contribution to the resolution and prevention of refugee problems. More recently, however, the development difficulties experienced by many of the world's less affluent states have been witnessed in a succession of mass population displacements and humanitarian emergencies. Underdevelopment alone does not create refugees. But poverty, inequality and the competition for scarce resources can play an important part in creating the conditions in which mass population displacements take place.

Refugees and the global economy: trends and variations

When the Second World War came to an end, the world's refugees were concentrated in the industrialized states of Europe, where immediate post-war reconstruction, rather than longer-term development, was the primary preoccupation. This reconstruction process, supported by initiatives such as the Marshall Plan and the creation of the Bretton Woods institutions, created an unusually strong and sustained economic boom, bringing a wide range of benefits to people who had suffered the deprivations of the war and the economic recession which had preceded it.

The rapid growth of the international economy at this time also played an important role in the search for solutions to the post-war refugee crisis. First, it enabled the countries of Western Europe to cope with the massive number of people who had been uprooted during the war (up to 40 million according to some estimates), as well as the subsequent influx of refugees from the newly-established communist bloc. Second, it allowed a large proportion of the European refugee population to start new lives in countries such as the USA, Canada, Australia and Israel, where they filled a growing gap in the labour market and thereby contributed to the prosperity of those societies.

A third effect of the post-war boom was to ease the process of decolonization and state formation in Africa, Asia and other less-developed regions. During the 1950s and 1960s, the colonial territories and newly independent states enjoyed high levels of demand for their export products, as well as favourable terms of trade, substantial levels of inward investment and generous allocations of aid from the industrialized states. With living standards rising, income-earning opportunities expanding and public services improving, the disengagement of the colonial powers progressed with relatively few major refugee movements. At this confident moment in history, it was widely believed that the development of the world's poorer countries would be a speedy and irreversible process.

As we now know, such projections proved to be far too optimistic. For in the 1970s and 1980s, the post-war boom finally came to an end, confronting the less-developed regions with a succession of economic shocks: sharp increases in the price of oil, a slump in primary product prices, rising interest rates, drastic falls in private investment, a growing burden of debt and a freeze in development assistance budgets.

Since that downturn took place, the economic performance of different countries and regions has varied considerably. The industrialized economies have continued to expand, although at a much slower rate than in the post-war years. At the same time, a limited number of countries, primarily in East Asia, have recorded some spectacular economic achievements, achieving very high levels of export-led growth and a rapid increase in per capita incomes.

Other parts of the world, however, have found it much more difficult to sustain the development process. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, the region most vulnerable to external economic influences, per capita Gross Domestic Product slumped by some 30 per cent during the 1980s, while real incomes dropped by a quarter. Resources such as roads, schools, health services, credit facilities and social welfare programmes, all of which had been improved during the post-war boom, fell into neglect, placing further constraints on the economic performance and development potential of the countries concerned. The situation remains critical. 'The gap between needs and available resources in Africa is widening,' the United Nations reports. 'Per capita incomes have continued falling in the 1990s, and a marked deterioration has taken place in essential social services, especially education and health care.'

The severity and human impact of the economic crisis has been exacerbated by two additional factors: rapid population growth, particularly amongst the poorer sectors of society; and the degradation of the natural environment, manifested most visibly in problems such as deforestation, desertification and declining soil fertility. The

combination of these trends has meant that more and more people are moving onto ecologically fragile land, reducing their subsistence levels and increasing their vulnerability to disasters such as drought and famine. In many low-income countries, these economic and environmental difficulties have been inextricably linked to a set of social and political problems: growing competition for scarce resources; increased communal tensions; declining standards of governance and public probity; high levels of military expenditure; and a proliferation of social conflicts and civil wars, leading to the destruction of many productive assets and the further degradation of the environment.

Since the late 1970s, the international financial institutions and donor states have attempted to halt this spiral of decline by requiring many less-developed countries to introduce structural adjustment programmes, entailing an increased reliance on market forces and a concomitant reduction in the role of the state. While the longer-term impact of these reforms remains a subject of debate, it is clear that in the short term, structural adjustment has confronted many of the world's poorest people with further reductions in wages, employment opportunities, government subsidies and social welfare services.

More recently, many of the former Soviet states have introduced similar programmes of reform, with the intention of escaping from the stagnation and distorted development priorities of the communist economic system. Again, however, the process of adjustment has proved to be painful for the populations concerned. Far from enjoying the material benefits which were anticipated when the USSR fell apart, the majority of former Soviet citizens now find that their real incomes have slumped while their public services have deteriorated.

Not surprisingly, the fluctuating performance of the international economy and the contrasting development experiences of different countries and regions have created a contradictory situation at the global level. In one sense, the world has become far more prosperous. Global Gross National Product, for example, has increased by 700 per cent since 1945, while aggregate gains have been made in relation to basic welfare indicators such as access to education, nutritional standards and infant mortality rates. According to the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the proportion of the world's population living in conditions defined as 'fairly satisfactory' increased from just 25 per cent in 1960 to 60 per cent in 1992.

Despite such signs of progress, the combination of economic stagnation and population growth in many of the world's poorer countries has produced an overall increase in the number of people who are living in situations of acute hardship. Despite all the scientific and technological achievements of recent years, a quarter of the global population does not get enough food, well over a billion people lack access to safe water and almost 15 million children die each year before the age of five. Furthermore, the gap between rich and poor people, both within and between nations, continues to increase. According to UNDP, the richest 20 per cent of the world's population now enjoys 60 times the income received by the poorest 20 per cent.

Figure 4.1  **Rates of economic growth in selected regions, 1985-1994**

Refugee numbers and development indicators

In a recent speech to the Bretton Woods institutions, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees observed that there is a 'strong and indisputable relationship' between the development difficulties which many countries have experienced in recent years and their propensity to be affected by conflict and mass population displacements.

Some simple statistical support for this assertion can be found by comparing UNHCR's data on refugee movements with UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI), which ranks states according to a composite measure of income, life expectancy and educational attainment. In 1994, Canada, Switzerland and Japan headed this list of 173 countries, while Afghanistan, Burkina Faso and Guinea filled the last three places.

A comparison of these two sets of data reveals that countries with the highest ranking on the HDI are the least likely to experience mass population displacements. Significantly, none of the top 30 countries on the 1994 index can be considered to be refugee-producing states. (The successor states of Yugoslavia, it should be noted, do not appear in the 1994 HDI). Of the 53 countries categorized by UNDP under the heading 'high human development', only three - Russia, Colombia and Armenia - have witnessed significant population displacements in recent years.

Conversely, countries with the lowest ranking on the HDI have by far the highest propensity to generate large movements of refugees and displaced people. Thus of the 30 states at the bottom of the index, half have experienced substantial forced migrations over the past five years, including many of the countries most seriously affected by the problem of human displacement: Afghanistan, Angola, Bhutan, Burundi, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia and Togo.

To complete the picture provided by this comparison, two additional observations can be made. First, low levels of development alone do not create refugees. Countries such as Tanzania, Nepal, Malawi and Guinea, for example, ranked 148, 149, 157 and 173 respectively on the HDI, do not feature at all on UNHCR's recent refugee statistics, except as countries which have given refuge to large numbers of people fleeing from other states. Forced migrations may therefore be a common characteristic of low-income countries, but they are not an inevitable one.

Second, in addition to the large cluster of refugee-producing countries which are to be found at the lower end of the HDI, a number of states which UNDP places in the category of 'medium human development' have also experienced significant and recent population displacements. In addition to Iraq, Peru and Sri Lanka, this group includes countries such as Azerbaijan, Georgia and Tajikistan - newly independent states whose current HDI rating fails to reflect the full extent of the social and economic dislocations experienced in the post-Soviet period. Countries whose citizens enjoy a moderate standard of living may therefore be less likely to produce

refugees than the world's poorest states. But they are certainly not immune to the problem of human displacement, particularly if their economic fortunes are on a downward curve.

Economic explanations

Countries with broadly similar development difficulties have not been affected equally by the problem of human displacement.

Despite the interesting correlations which can be found between levels of displacement and human development, it would be a mistake to believe that refugee problems can be explained in crudely economic terms.

First, it is evident that countries which have been confronted with broadly similar development difficulties have not been affected equally by the problem of human displacement. Why, for instance, did Uganda experience a succession of mass expulsions, refugee movements and internal displacements in the 1970s and 1980s, whereas neighbouring Tanzania - whose economy was in an equally if not more parlous state - was almost totally unaffected by such problems? As these examples suggest, variables such as a country's ethnic composition, constitutional arrangements, political leadership, cultural characteristics and foreign relationships (not to mention the issues of geographical location and topography) play an important part in determining the size, composition and direction of refugee movements.

Second, although a general relationship can be established between levels of development and displacement, many of the largest refugee movements of recent years have been provoked by events which appear unrelated (or only distantly related) to economic factors: the communist victory in Viet Nam; the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan; the struggle for independence in Africa's last colonies; the destabilization of Mozambique by South African-sponsored rebels; and Iraq's attempt to subjugate its Kurdish population.

Third, as with any statistical comparison, correlation and causation should not be confused. As one scholar has pointed out, poverty and scarcity may well play a part in provoking conflict, violence and population displacements. But conflict, violence and population displacements may also be responsible for creating conditions of poverty and scarcity. 'Famines, for example, are more often the consequence than the cause of war. Internal wars are highly destructive of physical infrastructures, impede investment and decimate human capital. Often the most educated and enterprising individuals flee the country.'

Finally, while poverty certainly prompts many people to migrate within and beyond their own country, the refugee definition which has been accepted by the international community clearly excludes people who have left their homeland to escape from economic deprivation. Exiled populations may often come from very

poor countries and be destitute when they arrive in a country of asylum. But refugee movements cannot be 'caused' by economic, environmental or demographic problems alone. The linkage between underdevelopment and displacement must therefore be regarded as an indirect or contributory one.

The precise nature of that linkage evidently varies from one situation to another, and is mediated by different forms of social and political conflict. In Central America, for example, the mass population displacements of the early 1980s were rooted to a large extent in conflicts between social classes, emanating from the unequal distribution of resources and the differential impact of the economic cycle on the richer and poorer members of society (see [Box 4.1](#)).

According to one study of the region, 'the landed and wealthy minorities reaped the gains of great economic growth in the 1960s. However, Central America's development gains were stymied by the world oil recession in the early 1970s. When popular organizations emerged that began to make increasingly vocal demands for land and jobs, at a time when resources were scarce, these organizations were put down by ever more powerful militaries. Guerilla movements that had previously been small and scattered began to grow and challenge the military... By the 1980s it was war, and massive numbers of people were fleeing widespread counterinsurgency attacks.'

A different pattern of conflict and displacement can be seen in the Caucasus, where longstanding development distortions, combined with the hardships of the post-communist era, have contributed to a spate of confrontations between different social groups as well as the central and regional authorities. As an analysis undertaken by UNHCR's Regional Bureau for Europe suggests, 'although these disputes are more often than not economic in nature (that is, they arise as a result of competition between different groups over access to scarce resources), they are often expressed in ethnic terms, as different groups react to real or perceived discrimination by others.'

Similar processes can be observed in Africa, where the disruption of the development process, the decline in living standards and the subsequent competition for resources have found expression in different types of conflict and population displacement.

In some instances, official and public hostility has been targeted at indigenous or alien minority groups. Perhaps the best-known example of this syndrome took place in Nigeria in 1983, when up to two million foreign migrants, primarily from Ghana and other West African states, were summarily expelled by the government, whose popularity had been undermined by a sharp reduction in oil revenues and widespread evidence of financial mismanagement. Between 1992 and 1994, in a much less publicized expulsion, large numbers of migrants (or 'non-originaires' as they were described), were forced out of Zaire's Katanga Province, where the collapse of the mining industry had led to high unemployment levels and a sharp decline in living standards. According to one account, some 700,000 people were involved in this population displacement.

The neighbouring state of Rwanda provides an even more graphic demonstration of the way in which the silent crisis of underdevelopment can erupt into a very noisy humanitarian emergency. In their efforts to explain the massacres and forced migrations which took place in that country during 1994, many commentators have

drawn attention to the supposedly ancient enmity between the Hutu and Tutsi people, and the way in which such ethnic allegiances have been exploited by the ruling elite.

But any analysis of the current crisis must also accord a central role to the developmental difficulties which have confronted Rwanda in recent years: the highest population density in Africa and an annual population growth rate of over three per cent; the exhaustion of the country's limited agricultural land and its division into ever smaller farming plots; a 30 per cent reduction in per capita food production since the early 1980s; a collapse in the market price of coffee, Rwanda's principal export crop; and the simultaneous introduction of a structural adjustment programme which froze public salaries and devalued the local currency by almost 80 per cent.

Prevention through development

The international community's efforts to avert further refugee movements have not taken adequate account of the relationship between underdevelopment and displacement. In general, such efforts have focused on the more immediate and tangible causes of displacement, particularly human rights violations and armed conflict. As a result, the notion of prevention has become synonymous with activities such as human rights monitoring, peacekeeping, institution-building and dispute resolution.

While the importance of such activities should not be minimized, one must also recognize that they can have only a marginal impact on the deeper economic and social roots of the refugee problem. It is therefore of some significance that during the past year or two, a growing number of actors within the international community have spoken of the need to promote 'preventive development'. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees referred to this issue herself in a recent speech to the Organization of African Unity, observing that 'today's refugee problems cannot be treated in isolation from the political, social and economic causes which give rise to them.' 'There is no doubt that rehabilitation and development require an enormous commitment of resources,' she continued. 'But investments which seem large now may prove to be money well spent in the future, and certainly less costly than prolonged instability and conflicts.'

Aid and investment

With the end of the Cold War, the world's more powerful states have a significantly reduced strategic interest in unstable and impoverished countries.

It would be naive to ignore the fact that some important obstacles stand in the way of any strategy intended to promote the development of the world's poorest and most conflict-prone countries. With the end of the Cold War, the world's more powerful states have a significantly reduced strategic interest in unstable and impoverished states. Foreign aid programmes are already under growing pressure throughout the industrialized world. In 1993 alone, for example, official development

assistance (ODA) levels slumped by some eight per cent and reached a 20-year low in relation to the Gross National Product of the donor states.

During the same two decades, private investment levels in the developing countries have soared, to the extent that they are now substantially greater than total ODA expenditure. Not surprisingly, however, the vast majority of this investment has been targeted at a small group of relatively stable and prosperous states, rather than the much larger number of low-income countries affected by conflict, political instability and refugee movements.

Aid and investment, of course, constitute only two elements of the development equation. According to UNDP, the low-income countries expended some US\$160 billion in debt repayments in 1992, almost precisely the same as the total amount which they received in the form of ODA and private investment. Similarly, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development has calculated that trade restrictions imposed by the industrialized states currently deprive the developing countries of more income than the total amount which they receive in ODA. In the light of such statistics, UNDP reaches a sobering conclusion: 'that a major restructuring of the world's income distribution, production and consumption patterns may be a necessary precondition for any viable strategy for sustainable human development.'

Given the weak bargaining position of the world's poorest countries, it is fanciful to believe that such reforms can be imposed upon the governments, corporations and financial institutions which dominate the global economy. Ultimately, the richer and more powerful members of the international community will have to be convinced that the manifestations of underdevelopment - social violence and civil war, environmental degradation and population growth, refugee crises and large-scale migratory movements - represent a threat to their own interests and an affront to their values.

At the same time, if they are to gain the confidence of the industrialized states, low-income countries will be obliged to demonstrate that they are committed to the principles of good governance and sound financial management. Poverty and inequalities cannot be overcome with international support if the political will for change does not exist at the national level.

Figure 4.2 Official development assistance, 1974-1993

An agenda for development

In order to address the underlying social, economic and demographic causes of so many refugee problems, a concrete agenda for development will also be required. Some of the most pertinent proposals in this respect are to be found in UNDP's *Human Development Report*, which has stressed the need for strategies which focus not only on the pursuit of economic growth, but also on the equitable distribution of wealth, the prioritization of social goals and the regeneration of the natural environment. More specifically, these proposals include:

- implementing the '20:20 compact', whereby donor countries earmark at least 20 per cent of their aid budgets and recipient states devote at least 20 per cent of their national budgets to human priority concerns, including basic education, primary health care, family planning and the provision of safe drinking water;
- capturing the 'peace dividend' which has resulted from the end of the Cold War, through planned reductions in the development, production, export and purchase of arms, coupled with the redirection of military savings into human priority concerns;
- creating a UN-administered 'human security fund' to combat transnational problems such as environmental pollution, natural resource depletion, natural disasters, communicable diseases and narcotics production, financed by military savings, ODA allocations and the introduction of international taxes on energy use, toxic emissions and speculative capital movements; and,
- establishing a more equitable relationship between the industrialized and low-income countries by broadening the notion of development cooperation to include resource transfers such as private investment, trade, labour migration and debt repayments, as well as ODA allocations.

One of the most attractive - and realistic - features of these suggestions is the extent to which they can be implemented on a cost-free basis. The 20:20 compact, for example, as well as the peace dividend proposal, both entail a redistribution of current expenditure by the industrialized and low-income states, rather than an absolute increase in spending.

This is not to suggest that the resources devoted to development cannot be augmented. Indeed, if there is one lesson to be learned from the recent succession of large-scale humanitarian emergencies, it is that it is both less costly and more humane to address the threats to human security in a proactive rather than a reactive manner. Emergency assistance is an essential means of saving lives and reducing the suffering of needy and displaced populations. In that sense it is also a prerequisite for solutions. But it can never be a substitute for the longer-term support which poor people need if they are to act as agents of development within their own communities.

Figure 4.3 **Actual and projected global military spending, 1987-2000**

Linking relief with longer-term assistance

However vigorously they are pursued, proactive strategies are unlikely to be fully successful in averting future refugee movements. Nor can such strategies resolve the plight of the millions of people who have already been forced to take refuge in countries with serious development difficulties. Assistance programmes intended to meet the needs of displaced populations must therefore contribute towards the broader objective of promoting economic recovery and sustainable development in low-income states.

Refugee aid and development

Photo ▶ **Taldi Kurgan Province, Kazakhstan: ethnic Kazakhs who have arrived from Mongolia, June 1995**

Photo ▶ **An environmental protection project for Afghan refugees and local villagers in Baluchistan, Pakistan, April 1990**

In the early years of the United Nations, when the majority of the world's displaced people were to be found in the industrialized countries, refugees and development were perceived as two distinct issues, with relatively little bearing upon each other. At this time the concept of development itself was still in its infancy, and did not even feature in the Charter of the new world body. The exclusion of the Palestinian refugee population from the mandate of UNHCR (a result of the Arab states' insistence on a political solution to their displacement) merely served to reinforce the notion that refugee questions were primarily a concern of the world's more prosperous regions.

The intimate nature of the relationship between displacement and development only became clear in the late 1960s, when UNHCR and its operational partners were obliged for the first time to launch large-scale relief programmes in Africa and other low-income regions. These programmes generally conformed to a standard model. Upon arrival in a country of asylum, refugees were accommodated in camps and settlements, where they received food and other relief items provided by the international community.

Once the emergency phase was over, the refugees concerned were encouraged to take up income-generating or wage-earning opportunities, in the hope that they would attain a level of subsistence comparable to that of the local population. In the long-term, it was anticipated that such settlements would become self-sufficient, at which point, responsibility for their administration could be 'handed over' from UNHCR to the host government.

As the 1970s progressed and the global refugee population grew, the difficulties associated with this model of assistance became increasingly clear, particularly in Africa. Instead of becoming self-sufficient, many refugee populations continued to be dependent on international assistance. And despite the substantial amounts of money invested in them, refugee camps and settlements generally made little contribution to the development of surrounding areas and the welfare of the local population.

By the end of the decade, the governments most directly concerned with the refugee problem were looking for alternative models of assistance. Countries of asylum, struggling to cope with the effects of the global recession, were expressing growing concern about the burden which refugees were placing on their economy, environment and infrastructure. Donor states, many of which were looking for ways to reduce their financial commitments, were growing increasingly reluctant to devote their scarce resources to open-ended 'care and maintenance' programmes for refugees in low-income countries.

The international community's response to this situation, formulated in a series of meetings during the late 1970s and early 1980s, became known as the 'refugee aid and development' strategy. In contrast to the established model of refugee relief, this approach stipulated that assistance should be development-oriented from the outset, and thereby enable beneficiaries to move quickly towards self-sufficiency.

Rather than focusing specifically on refugee camps and communities, the new strategy also emphasized the need for a focus on refugee-populated areas. International assistance, it was agreed, should be used not to provide relief but to promote development, and both refugees and the local population should benefit from that process.

Several different types of activity were envisaged under the refugee aid and development rubric. These included, for example, projects to provide farming, wage-earning and income-generating opportunities to both refugees and local people; projects intended to strengthen the physical and social infrastructure in areas where large numbers of refugees had settled; and projects designed to combat the environmental damage resulting from the presence of displaced populations.

The scale of such initiatives tended to be quite ambitious. At an international funding conference held in 1984, for example, 128 different refugee aid and development project proposals in Africa were presented to the donor states. The total amount requested for these projects amounted to some US\$362 million, an average of just under US\$3 million per project.

Expectations and achievements

The failure of the refugee aid and development approach reveals some of the conflicts of interest which can arise in the search for solutions to refugee problems.

Both intellectually and politically, the refugee aid and development concept appeared to be a very neat response to the refugee problem. And in a small number of instances, those expectations were to some extent fulfilled.

During the early 1980s, for example, more than three million Afghan refugees moved into Pakistan, imposing a heavy strain on the fragile ecology, infrastructure and economy of the country's border regions. In an attempt to mitigate such problems, to create a range of durable infrastructural assets in refugee-hosting areas and to alleviate the poverty of the Afghans and their local hosts, the Income-Generating Project for Afghan Refugees was established.

Undertaken jointly by the Pakistani government, the World Bank and UNHCR, this US\$86 million programme provided more than 21 million person-days of employment between 1984 and 1994, more than three-quarters of which benefited the refugee population. At the same time, this initiative allowed the completion of nearly 300 separate projects in three border provinces, mainly in areas such as afforestation, watershed management, irrigation, flood protection, road repair and construction. Throughout the programme, emphasis was placed on providing training

to the refugees, so that they could acquire the skills and experience needed to reconstruct their own country when repatriation became possible.

At a more general level, however, the refugee aid and development approach proved to be seriously flawed. As a UNHCR review of the subject concluded in 1991, 'the efforts made to date in the area of refugee aid and development have had limited results, mainly due to a lack of funding. Paradoxically, the projects which have not been funded are mainly those in Africa, where large numbers of refugees are to be found in some of the least developed countries of the world, and where the presence of a large concentration of refugees in care and maintenance situations is regarded as an important impediment to development.'

The failure of the refugee aid and development approach has more than an historical significance, as it reveals some of the conflicts of interest which can arise in the search for solutions to refugee problems, as well as the specific difficulties associated with a strategy focused on countries of asylum.

Despite the apparent clarity of the refugee aid and development notion, the ultimate objective of this approach remained essentially ambiguous. Was its purpose to promote the solution of local integration? Or was its aim simply to ameliorate the situation of refugees and local people, pending the day when the former could return to their homeland and thereby benefit from the solution of voluntary repatriation?

As far as most asylum countries were concerned, the latter objective took precedence. Their principal interest in the refugee aid and development approach was to be compensated more generously for the costs they were incurring by admitting refugees onto their territory. Host governments were generally much less interested in allowing those refugees to attain the full range of social, economic and legal rights enjoyed by citizens of their country, as the solution of local integration demands. Indeed, one of the reasons why so many African governments insisted on establishing geographically segregated camps for refugees was specifically to limit their potential for integration.

By way of contrast, the world's donor states were much more interested in finding lasting solutions to refugee problems than they were in the notion of compensation. Their aim, in simple terms, was to reduce the number of refugees on the international community's books. They certainly did not want to invest very large sums of money in refugee populations which were going to remain dependent on external assistance for an indefinite period. Nor did they want to pour development resources into areas affected by mass influxes if the refugees concerned were about to repatriate.

Thus the donors felt that the refugee aid and development concept was being used as a means of mobilizing additional development funds for some hard-pressed countries, rather than a genuine effort to find lasting solutions to refugee problems. This suspicion was reinforced by the somewhat grandiose scale of the projects which they were asked to finance and the limited capacity of the countries concerned to make effective use of such large resource allocations.

By the end of the 1980s, therefore, the refugee aid and development approach to solutions was in many ways moribund, undermined by the ambiguity of its objectives and the reluctance of donor states to support the strategy financially. Moreover, as

the rest of this chapter suggests, the changing nature of the refugee problem over the past five years has obliged the international community to turn its attention to two other dimensions of the development-displacement nexus: the environmental impact of large-scale forced migrations, and the reintegration of refugees who have returned to their countries of origin.

Environmental dimensions of the refugee problem

Since the beginning of the decade, a succession of refugee influxes into some of the world's poorest countries (Bangladesh, Guinea, Nepal and Zaire, to give just four examples) has provided dramatic evidence of the environmental problems associated with mass population displacements. International interest in this neglected issue has evidently been reinforced by broader intellectual trends. During the 1950s and 1960s, when the global economy was booming, development specialists paid little attention to the notion of sustainability. In the bid for rapid economic growth, the land, the air, the seas and rivers were all regarded as if they were free and inexhaustible resources, with the capacity to recover from any damage which humanity inflicted upon them.

While such perceptions have not been entirely eradicated, public and political interest in the natural environment has increased enormously over the past two decades. Concepts such as global warming, acid rain and the greenhouse effect, once the preserve of a few scientists and activists, have now passed into the common vocabulary. Very few people can now be entirely ignorant of the fact that the earth's resources are both fragile and finite.

Wood, land and water

Experience has demonstrated that three principal types of environmental change are liable to take place in areas populated by large numbers of refugees: deforestation, land degradation, and reductions in the quantity and quality of the water supply.

Deforestation is perhaps the most obvious (and certainly the most widely recognized) environmental problem in refugee-populated areas - a consequence of the fact that for most of the world's displaced people, wood constitutes the primary source of fuel and shelter material. Prior to their recent repatriation, for example, it was estimated that the million and more Mozambican refugees in Malawi were consuming between 500,000 and 700,000 cubic metres of wood each year for cooking and heating purposes - a rate of use far in excess of the country's natural replenishment capacity (see [Box 4.2](#)).

One does not need to be an environmental specialist to witness the results of this process. In Malawi and in other longstanding asylum countries - Pakistan, Somalia and Sudan, for example - refugee settlement sites are visibly surrounded by large areas of land which have been stripped of trees and vegetation. The same phenomenon can already be seen around the refugee camps of north-western Tanzania and eastern Zaire, which were established in 1994 to accommodate roughly two million refugees from Rwanda. According to a report from the largest camp in Tanzania, within nine months of their arrival, the refugees were having to walk about 12 kilometres in order to reach the nearest source of fuelwood. At the same time, much of the pasture land in the vicinity of the camps had been seriously overgrazed

by the thousands of cattle, sheep and goats which the refugees had brought with them.

A third area of environmental degradation associated with refugee movements relates to the quantity and quality of water resources. Water shortages are a common phenomenon in areas where large numbers of refugees are obliged to share a limited supply of water with the local population. Drilling additional boreholes to meet the increased demand may provide a short-term answer, but may also lead to a longer-term depletion of underground reserves, a problem compounded in some coastal areas by the incursion of salt water.

The pollution of water resources represents another important problem in many refugee-hosting areas, particularly in the early stages of an emergency, before the establishment of proper sanitation systems. Large concentrations of displaced people produce a great deal of excreta and other waste materials. If they are not properly treated, the soil and groundwater can quickly become contaminated.

Human consequences of environmental change

The need to sustain human life has often come into direct conflict with the longer-term objective of environmental protection.

The environmental changes which are generated by mass population displacements have a number of important implications for the well-being of the refugees themselves, for their relationship with the host country, and for the development potential of the areas where they settle.

In the most extreme circumstances, the depletion of natural resources in refugee-populated areas may pose an immediate threat to human life. Refugees who do not have access to wood or a substitute fuel, for example, may not be able to cook their food properly or keep themselves warm, and can thereby become vulnerable to malnutrition and other illnesses. Exposure to the smoke that is emitted when crop residues and dung are used for cooking can cause respiratory and eye infections, particularly amongst young children and the women who prepare their family's food. If local water sources are overused and polluted, and if alternative supplies are not made available, deaths are likely to occur as a result of dehydration and diseases such as cholera. The human consequences of this scenario were seen all too graphically in 1994, when the Zairian town of Goma was littered with the corpses of Rwandese refugees who had succumbed to such conditions.

While such tragic events may grab the attention of the international media, the environmental effects of large-scale refugee movements are not always so immediate or visible. Indeed, some of the most damaging consequences take place over long periods of time and are ultimately irreversible. Studies undertaken in the Burundian, Rwandese and Mozambican refugee settlements of Tanzania, for example, have indicated that the fertility of the land in those areas is progressively declining and that the structure of the soil is now breaking down. As a result, weeds are invading the land and crop yields are declining. At a certain point this process will

become unstoppable, and the affected areas will no longer be able to sustain the indigenous population, even if, like the Mozambicans, the refugees are able to go home.

As the latter example suggests, local communities, particularly their poorer and weaker members, may be affected as seriously as refugees by the process of environmental degradation. In addition to the more obvious problems such as soil erosion, the depletion of wood and water supplies and the introduction of new livestock diseases, refugee influxes may also threaten local hunting areas and cause damage to sites which are used to gather honey, herbs and medicinal plants. While such activities may not contribute a great deal to a country's Gross National Product, they often make an important contribution to the local economy.

By endangering the livelihood of indigenous populations, such environmental impacts can also jeopardize relations between refugees and the host country. In Bangladesh, for example, competition for fuelwood in the heavily populated areas where many Myanmar refugees have settled has led to antagonism between the two communities. Similar tensions have arisen in eastern Zaire, where conflicts over natural resources have been exacerbated by the massive amounts of international assistance channelled to the refugee population. Disturbingly, a growing number of low-income countries are now citing such problems as a justification for the exclusion or repatriation of refugee populations.

Finally, while the environmental impact of refugee movements is felt most keenly at the local and national levels, issues of a much wider ecological significance are also at stake. In situations where rare species or unique ecosystems are threatened by mass population displacements, irreversible losses in global biodiversity may occur. The Rwandese crisis, for example, has caused irreversible damage to the vegetation in Zaire's Virunga national park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. According to one UNHCR estimate, some 800,000 kilograms of wood and grass were being collected from the park by refugees each day in December 1994, a level which evidently cannot be sustained if the unique flora and fauna found in the area are to be conserved. Here, as in many other refugee situations, the immediate need to sustain human life has come into direct conflict with the longer-term objective of environmental protection.

Understanding environmental impact

While it is relatively easy to list the different kinds of pressure which refugee movements place upon the natural environment, some words of caution are required with respect to the measurement and interpretation of their impact.

In practice it is often very difficult to differentiate between the environmental changes provoked by the presence of refugees and ecological processes which predate their arrival in an asylum country. Just because crop yields are declining in a refugee-populated area, for example, it does not necessarily mean that the refugees are responsible for that trend, or that yields were stable in the preceding period. Other variables could also be at work.

Identifying those variables is rarely easy. In many situations, refugees move into remote areas where estimates of the existing stock of resources and rates of environmental change are simply not available. While it is possible to measure

environmental indicators such as water quality or vegetative cover by using sampling techniques or satellite image analysis, such measurements require substantial time and resources, and are unlikely to be a priority in a refugee emergency. Assessments of environmental impact may also be exaggerated by host countries which are seeking international compensation for the damage caused by refugees.

In some instances, negative environmental trends such as deforestation or desertification may result not from the activities of refugees themselves, but from political, economic or social changes associated with their arrival. In parts of Pakistan, for example, land rights have been confused by the presence of so many Afghan refugees, and this confusion has been exploited by local profiteers to engage in large-scale illegal logging. Similarly, while the deforestation of certain areas in eastern Sudan has been blamed on the production of charcoal by Eritrean refugees, studies have shown that much of the output is destined for sale in Khartoum and other urban areas. The refugees' role in the process has simply been to act as a source of cheap labour for the Sudanese entrepreneurs who control the charcoal business.

Many analysts have suggested that because their presence in a country of asylum is likely to be temporary, refugees are generally less concerned about the conservation of natural resources than the host population. Even if there is some truth in this assertion (which has rarely been tested empirically) it must be seen within a broader social and economic context. Displaced people are usually poor people. They have limited financial and material resources, and in order to survive, they normally have to make use of whatever wood, water and shelter materials are available.

Over the longer term, refugees often find that they have been obliged to settle on small and marginal areas of land, which previously supported much lower population densities. In order to maintain crop yields, they may have little alternative but to practice intensive forms of agriculture and to make use of inorganic fertilizers, rather than using fallow periods to regenerate the soil. As a result, the land which they occupy is likely to become increasingly unproductive.

In situations where refugees have not been confronted with these constraints, they have been able to play a more positive role in the local development process. During the 1980s, for example, the large number of Ugandan refugees who fled to southern Sudan were able to contribute to a massive expansion in the area of land under cultivation. As a result, a number of refugee settlements which had initially been dependent on international assistance were soon able to provide the commodities which the World Food Programme needed for its projects in other parts of the country. More recently, the presence of Mozambican refugees in south-eastern Zambia also had many positive consequences for the local economy (see [Box 4.3](#)).

Humanitarian organizations

The environmental impact of refugees has in some senses been aggravated by the failure of humanitarian organizations to bring this issue into the mainstream of their activities. First, such organizations do not always respect the basic principles of environmental protection themselves. During the first few months of the 1994 Rwanda emergency, for example, many relief agencies in the region cut thousands of poles from local trees as well as large quantities of bamboo and grass in order to

build offices, storage facilities, clinics and feeding centres, when tents or prefabricated structures could just as easily have been used for this purpose.

Second, the refugee-centric nature of the traditional approach to population displacements has often blinded humanitarian organizations to the situation of host countries and communities. Donor states have usually been willing to provide the resources required to feed and shelter large refugee populations, particularly during highly publicized emergencies. But the needs of local people have invariably been accorded a much lower priority.

Third, to the extent that refugee organizations have addressed the environmental dimension of population displacements, they have generally not dealt with the problem in a sufficiently proactive manner. As a UNHCR consultant observed after visiting the Rwandese refugee camps in Zaire, by the time that environmental questions were fully considered, some irreversible decisions had been taken with regard to settlement sites, fuel supplies, shelter materials and water sources. 'Despite all of the worldwide attention on the environment,' he concluded, 'the subject of refugees and the environment has been more or less overlooked. If attention is paid at all to this problem, it is usually at a late stage of refugee situations, when the only action possible is remedial rather than preventive.'

From problem to action

While much progress remains to be made in this area, the recent emergence of a more proactive and holistic approach to the refugee problem has undoubtedly encouraged the international community to address the environmental consequences of human displacement in a more systematic manner. UNHCR, for example, has appointed an environmental coordinator to oversee the organization's efforts in this area.

In the area of deforestation, the organization is now placing much greater emphasis on the establishment of nurseries and the replanting of areas which have already been denuded of trees. At the same time, a variety of different techniques are being used to limit the amount of fuelwood consumed by refugee populations. These include the creation of protected zones in local forests; the introduction of fuel-efficient stoves; the provision of kerosene, coal and other fuels to refugee populations; and the distribution of food aid in forms that do not require extended cooking times.

At a more general level, UNHCR's primary aim is to ensure that environmental considerations are taken into at the beginning of a refugee emergency, when crucial decisions are taken with regard to the identification, establishment and management of refugee settlements. To achieve this objective, three initiatives have been taken.

The first element of this strategy has been the preparation of environmental guidelines for use by the organization's field staff and operational partners. These guidelines stress the need to settle refugee populations in areas whose ecology is best able to withstand a sudden increase in population density, and in locations that are as far away as possible from protected areas such as national parks and game reserves. Once an appropriate site has been selected, the guidelines provide more detailed advice on the protection of trees and soils, the safe treatment of human excreta and the disposal of other waste products.

A second initiative concerns the establishment of an environmental database, which will provide further assistance in the selection of refugee settlement sites. Although it is still incomplete, the database is able to provide UNHCR's field offices with detailed information on issues such as local climatic and vegetation zones, transport networks, infrastructural resources and national parks.

A third element of the UNHCR strategy is to be seen in the new requirement for an environmental impact assessment to be carried out at a very early stage of each refugee emergency. Such assessments provide an important opportunity to identify both actual and potential environmental problems generated by mass population movements. Moreover, when linked with on-going monitoring activities, such assessments will enable the organization to track the environmental changes which are taking place in refugee-populated areas and to formulate suitable responses.

These initiatives are indicative of the extent to which environmental issues have made their way onto the refugee agenda. They do not, however, represent a quick or easy solution. Emergency relief programmes are not like development projects, which can be planned in advance and implemented (or even rejected) on the basis of feasibility studies.

When large numbers of destitute people move into environmentally fragile areas, saving human lives must be the first priority. In such circumstances, it can often be difficult to meet all of the ideal criteria for the selection and management of refugee settlement sites. Often, for example, the overriding need to locate refugees in areas close to safe and adequate supplies of water has had to take precedence over all other environmental considerations.

Other practical factors must also be taken into account. In eastern Zaire, for example, several commentators have remarked upon the need to move the Rwandese refugees away from the border, dispersing them into smaller settlements where their environmental impact will be less damaging. While this strategy has been pursued to a limited extent, it is confronted with several obstacles. Who, for example, will meet the massive costs involved in relocating the refugees within Zaire, when it has been agreed that repatriation to Rwanda is the best solution for them? Where in Zaire would the refugees be resettled, and how would the local population in the chosen locations respond to the influx? And what would happen to refugees who were unwilling to move away from the border?

As these questions suggest, it would be a mistake to believe that the environmental problem can be resolved by technical solutions. Like development itself, the environmental issue is ultimately a political one, entailing questions of ownership, resource use, the distribution of wealth and the exercise of authority. As an abstract entity, mankind may have a common interest in sustainable development and environmental conservation. In refugee situations, however, significant differences of interest are likely to be found between and within the displaced and local populations.

An effective environmental strategy must be based on a better understanding of these different interests and the ways in which they can be reconciled. In West Africa, for example, where almost a million Liberian refugees have settled in and around existing village communities, refugee and local leaders have negotiated a variety of arrangements in order to regulate the exploitation of natural resources and

to resolve any disputes arising from their use. Although more research is required into the nature and impact of such agreements, their very existence underlines the importance of approaching the environmental problem on a community-wide basis.

Rebuilding shattered societies

Refugee situations are provoked and perpetuated by violence. When the armed conflicts and human rights abuses which force people to abandon their homes have been halted, then refugees are usually eager to return to their own country and community.

But the developmental dimension of any refugee situation persists long after the last exile has gone home. On one hand, as the preceding section explained, countries of asylum may have to live for years - or even indefinitely - with the environmental degradation caused by the presence of a large refugee population. On the other hand, when displaced populations are able to repatriate, they normally go back to societies which have been shattered by years of war and economic decline.

Repatriation assistance: the origins of a new approach

Returnees tend to be just one of many groups who are trying to establish a more productive life in the aftermath of a violent conflict.

For many years, UNHCR provided refugees with a very modest package of assistance when they returned to their homeland: a supply of basic foodstuffs to last until the next harvest, some agricultural inputs such as seeds and tools, and an assortment of shelter materials and household items. Occasionally, the organization also helped to establish credit schemes, income-generating projects and short-term rehabilitation programmes in the areas where returnees had settled. But in general, reintegration was considered to be the responsibility of the returnees and their government. In keeping with the exile-oriented and refugee-specific nature of UNHCR's traditional orientation, the organization's interest in its beneficiaries essentially ceased once they crossed the border and resumed life within their own country.

Over the past few years, this approach to the solution of voluntary repatriation has been brought into question by a number of different trends.

First, the number of refugees returning to their homes has grown very rapidly. Since 1990, the resolution of armed conflicts in countries such as Cambodia, El Salvador, Eritrea, Mozambique and Nicaragua, coupled with the more localized opportunities for repatriation in states such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia and Sri Lanka, has allowed some nine million refugees to repatriate. The corresponding figure in the previous five-year period amounted to just 1.2 million.

Second, as suggested by the countries listed above, recent repatriation movements have involved some of the most deprived countries on earth. The countries to which refugees return are often devastated: villages razed to the ground; bridges blown

up; road and fields mined; irrigation systems collapsed, schools, clinics and other public amenities in ruins.

The repatriation of refugees from Somalia to Ethiopia in 1992 provides a typical example. According to one UNHCR report on the movement, 'Ethiopia was in a state of acute societal disorder. The past governance system had failed and considerable uncertainty, social strife and lawlessness continued. Severe and repeated drought was contributing to acute food scarcity for the general population. Continuing conflict was creating new displacements and hardships, as well as hampering aid efforts. Developmental efforts in the returnee receiving areas were virtually non-existent. In addition to causing distress among the local population, such conditions obstructed opportunities for the successful reintegration of returnees.'

Third, as this statement suggests, given the level of devastation and social disruption in many countries of origin, it can no longer be assumed that the needs of returning refugees are any greater than those of other citizens affected by war and the loss of development opportunities. In some situations - Cambodia being one - there is evidence to suggest that returnees who have lived for many years in well-organized refugee settlements are healthier, wealthier and better educated than many of their compatriots.

In countries of origin generally, returnees now tend to be just one of many groups of people who are trying to establish a more peaceful and productive life in the aftermath of a violent conflict. Thus in many parts of Mozambique, for example, a single community or geographical area might accommodate not only *regressados* (returnees), but also *affectados* (people affected by the war), *deslocados* (internally displaced people), *recuperados* (people liberated from rebel-held areas) and *soldados desmovilizados* (former soldiers from government and rebel armies). (see [Box 4.4](#))

Fourth and finally, recent experience has demonstrated that the governments of many war-torn societies are simply not in a position to assume full responsibility for the reintegration of returning refugees and other displaced populations. In Somalia, for example, there is no national government. In Afghanistan, the central government controls only a small proportion of the country. In Cambodia, the authorities simply do not have the capacity or the resources required to provide significant amounts of reintegration assistance.

Development agencies are not able to fill this vacuum. Unlike refugee and relief oriented organizations, development agencies normally work on the basis of long-term plans and programmes, making it difficult for them to respond to unpredictable events such as repatriation movements. Normally, moreover, such agencies have tended to focus on relatively large-scale and long-term development efforts, undertaken in close cooperation with the central government, rather than the more immediate, smaller and more localized initiatives required in returnee areas.

In the circumstances described above, the very modest amount of assistance which UNHCR has traditionally provided to returnees - a package once dismissively referred to as 'a cooking pot and a handshake' - is evidently inadequate. Refugees who return to their own country and who subsequently find that they cannot survive may once again become dependent on humanitarian relief. Alternatively, they may be obliged to join the stream of rural to urban migrants, thereby compounding one of the most difficult social problems confronting many less-developed countries. In neither of

these scenarios can it be said that voluntary repatriation has led to a genuine or lasting resolution of the refugees' plight.

The traditional model of returnee-specific assistance has a number of other limitations. By favouring one section of the community, it jeopardizes the process of social reconciliation which is so badly needed in post-conflict situations. By offering returnees so little in the way of longer-term support, it provides a very weak incentive for refugees to repatriate, particularly those who have a relatively secure existence in their country of asylum. And by focusing on the immediate consumption needs of returnees, it does nothing to provide a basis for the development process which is required to prevent further crises and population displacements in countries of origin.

The returnee aid and development approach, which UNHCR has formulated over the past few years, represents an attempt to address the limitations of earlier approaches to the question of returnee assistance and reintegration. The approach, now often referred to as 'reintegration support', is based on five basic principles and assumptions:

- that UNHCR has a responsibility to assist with the reintegration of refugees, not simply to organize their repatriation;
- that the successful reintegration of returnees and other displaced people does not occur automatically, but is dependent upon the resumption of sustainable development activities in areas of origin;
- that reintegration assistance is most effective and equitable when provided on a community-wide basis, bringing benefits to the entire population of areas where returnees have settled;
- that reintegration assistance should be provided in a way that discourages dependency and which contributes to the development of local competence and capacities; and,
- that to maximize impact and sustainability, a smooth interface must be established between the short-term assistance provided to returnee areas and the longer-term development programmes of the host government and international agencies.

Quick impact projects

UNHCR's efforts to put these principles into practice have focused on a form of reintegration assistance known as QIPs - Quick Impact Projects. QIPs are simple, small-scale projects, designed to bring tangible, visible and immediate benefits to areas where significant numbers of returnees and displaced people have settled. Originally formulated in Central America, they have since been extended to countries such as Cambodia, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Myanmar, Somalia and Sri Lanka. QIPs can be implemented rapidly and at low cost, making maximum use of local resources, labour and institutions. While they are intended to bring benefits to entire communities, they can also be targeted to meet the needs of particular groups of people, such as female heads of household and the physically disabled. QIPs are normally based on needs identified by local communities themselves, but are also selected on the basis of their compatibility with other development initiatives in the same area.

QIPs could in many senses be described in the same words that UNDP uses to define the concept of human development: 'pro-people, pro-jobs, pro-nature and pro-women.' Such attributes are illustrated very clearly by the programme of QIPs established in north-eastern Sri Lanka, where some 700,000 internally displaced people and returnees are to be found.

Costing on average less than US\$10,000 each, the projects have included, for example, equipping a fishing cooperative with canoes and nets, establishing school libraries, providing vocational training courses, planting trees in deforested areas, establishing a handicraft centre for widows and single women, stocking a goat farm, installing cold storage facilities in health centres, rehabilitating roads and digging communal wells. As this list suggests, QIPs differ widely in every respect except for their ultimate objective: to enable the return and reintegration of displaced populations.

The returnee aid and development strategy appears to avoid the major pitfalls which undermined the refugee aid and development approach. It is unambiguously intended to promote and consolidate the solution of voluntary repatriation. It is modest in the resources which it requires. It brings benefits to countries of origin (which have an economic and political interest in the successful return and reintegration of refugees) to donor states (which still have an interest in seeing a reduction in the number of refugees requiring international assistance) and to countries of asylum (which are generally eager to see the repatriation of refugees from their territory).

For the beneficiaries themselves, the potential benefits of this approach are nicely described by the objective which Sri Lanka's Ministry of Reconstruction has set for the programme of QIPs in that country: 'creating a congenial environment to live without fear, and providing the social and economic infrastructure for resettlers to recommence their normal life with confidence.'

There is now considerable evidence to suggest that these promises have been at least partially realized. QIPs have met with widespread appreciation from the governments and beneficiaries concerned, and, just as significantly, have attracted generous financial support from the donor community. At the same time, detailed assessments of several recent UNHCR reintegration programmes suggest that they have made a very positive contribution to the processes of reintegration and reconciliation. A review of reintegration efforts in Nicaragua, for example, concluded that the achievements of the programme had included:

- providing communities with urgently needed resources which government structures were unable to offer;
- boosting the morale and motivation of returnees, thereby encouraging them to remain in the rural areas where they had settled;
- reconciling and reintegrating groups of people with different interests and political allegiances; and,
- revitalizing local economies through the provision of new training, wage-earning and income-generating opportunities.

Similar results have been recorded elsewhere. An analysis of the reintegration programme in Cambodia, for example, observed that QIPs had boosted the economic performance of returnee areas by removing some of the constraints to agricultural

production and exchange, provided communities with an incentive and the means to make land available to the returnee population, and assisted UNHCR's efforts to monitor the welfare and security of returnees.

Most recently, a review of UNHCR activities in Somalia concluded that despite the very difficult operational environment encountered in that country, QIPs had at least two major achievements to their credit: encouraging the repatriation of refugees from Kenya and thereby enabling the closure of several camps in that country; and stabilizing the resident population within parts of Somalia, thereby averting further refugee movements. Given Kenya's very open reluctance to continue hosting the Somali refugees, one might also conclude that QIPs have helped to avert a potential protection crisis.

Rehabilitation under conflict

The introduction of new development resources in war-torn societies can be the cause of further unrest.

Although it has become clear that Quick Impact Projects can make a very valuable contribution to the process of returnee reintegration, the limitations of this approach and the practical difficulties which stand in its way cannot be ignored.

QIPs represent only one form of reintegration assistance. Family-based food and relief packages of the type which UNHCR has traditionally provided to returnees, for example, continue to be a necessity for people who are going home after years in a foreign country and who have not been able to accumulate any resources during their time in exile.

Other forms of reintegration assistance can usefully be provided to refugees before they leave their country of asylum. In Pakistan, for example, UNHCR has established a scheme whereby the Afghan refugees can cash in their family ration card and use the proceeds to pay for the transport, building materials and household items they need to reestablish themselves in their country of origin. As the popularity of this programme suggests (more than 295,000 ration cards had been cashed in by July 1995) the specific mixture of assistance provided in any returnee situation must always be determined in relation to local needs and opportunities, and, of course, the availability of funds.

Another issue which requires further consideration concerns the role of reintegration assistance in situations where refugees are returning to countries where there is no central government and where armed conflict is still taking place. UNHCR's recent experience in Somalia, for example, suggests that such conditions can impose serious constraints on rehabilitation efforts.

First, problems of access can easily arise in areas affected by fighting and banditry. UNHCR's QIP programme in southern Somalia, for example, had to be administered from bases inside Kenya, due to the insecurity which prevailed on the other side of the border. In many instances UNHCR personnel found that it was too dangerous to

undertake thorough assessments of reintegration needs in returnee-populated areas, while on one occasion a group of staff members found themselves besieged in a compound for four days while heavy fighting between armed factions raged all around them.

Second, in situations which are characterized by scarcity and instability, the introduction of new development resources can provoke unrest rather than promoting reconciliation. As one UNHCR report on the Somali programme observed, 'QIPs have become an additional cause of conflict among the warring factions. Despite a local peace conference, the warlords have not been able to cooperate. As a result, UNHCR and other agencies are constantly under the pressure of opposed parties, eager to derive personal benefits from the assistance programme.'

Third, as the preceding quotation suggests, the absence of any long-term security has encouraged the Somali population to maximize the immediate returns which they can extract from the programme of QIPs, rather than regarding such projects as a sustainable source of benefits. 'UNHCR's operation,' the same report comments, 'is widely regarded by the Somalis as a mere vehicle for cash and marketable goods.' In one notorious example of this problem, UNHCR found that the hand-pumps it was installing were being dismantled and sold as scrap metal or used to make weapons, instead of providing clean water!

Fourth, while donor states are very keen to see the repatriation of refugee populations, some are naturally hesitant when it comes to financing reintegration programmes in countries affected by armed conflict. In 1993 and 1994, donors were prepared to take the risk, and contributed more than US\$13 million to UNHCR's programme of QIPs. More recently, however, the deterioration of the situation within Somalia, coupled with the withdrawal of the UN troops and the competing demands of the Rwanda emergency, has caused them to think again about the wisdom of investing resources in the country.

This is not to suggest that reconstruction activities are impossible in countries affected by conflict and instability. Many successful small-scale development activities have been undertaken in Afghanistan, for example, particularly in areas where a degree of political and social stability has been established (see [Box 4.5](#)). In fact, some aid agency personnel have argued that it can be easier to work with local people and community leaders in situations where state structures have disappeared.

Furthermore, an absence of government should not be equated with anarchy. When the UN peacekeeping force withdrew from Somalia, for example, it was widely predicted that local leaders and warlords would turn the country into one huge battlefield. This scenario had not materialized by mid-1995, however, when organizations working inside the country reported that a number of successful peacebuilding efforts had been initiated at local level.

Speed and sustainability

A final issue which has been raised in relation to QIPs concerns their sustainability and the contribution which they can make to the longer-term development process in areas where returnees have settled. When UNHCR first introduced the quick impact project approach, some commentators suggested that the concept was a

contradiction in terms. Development, they argued, was by definition a protracted process, and was therefore not an objective which could be achieved in the one or two years of a UNHCR returnee reintegration programme. The objective of post-repatriation assistance efforts, it was suggested, should not be quick impact but sustainable impact.

If QIPs are to achieve their objective of consolidating voluntary repatriation, however, both speed and sustainability are required. The element of speed is essential because impoverished communities cannot be expected to welcome large numbers of returnees without an immediate expansion of their absorptive capacity. In simple terms, when the population of an area increases rapidly, so does the level of demand for services such as health care, education, training and transport, as well as resources such as water, land, seeds and tools. Unless that demand is met, an influx of returnees may provoke new forms of hardship, tensions and migratory movements.

The element of sustainability is needed because the reintegration of refugees cannot be achieved overnight, nor can it be undertaken in isolation from longer-term efforts to promote the recovery of conflict-affected countries. It is relatively easy, for example, to build a bridge, to construct a school or to clear some agricultural land in an area where returnees have settled. It is much more difficult to ensure that the bridge is properly maintained, that the school is provided with teachers and classroom equipment, and that the land is not appropriated by a local official.

The task of reintegrating refugees and displaced people therefore represents just one component of the much broader effort to rebuild war-torn societies. This, of course, is a complex undertaking, much of which falls beyond the competence of UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations.

By way of illustration, a recent international gathering on Rwanda noted that the country's rehabilitation needs included the establishment of an independent judiciary and police force; the payment of wages to the country's armed forces; the restoration of the country's electricity grid; emergency assistance for internally displaced people and returning refugees; the provision of seeds and tools to rural communities; the purchase of office equipment and vehicles for government departments; the resolution of land tenure disputes involving returnees; and assistance in meeting World Bank arrears. If they are to be undertaken effectively, such tasks must be pursued simultaneously, and with an equal sense of urgency.

Hitherto, the international community's efforts in the area of post-conflict reconstruction have not proved wholly successful. According to a research project which is analyzing experience in countries such as Cambodia, El Salvador, Eritrea and Mozambique, 'all too often, large monetary and human investments in peacebuilding processes have yielded disappointing results.' While there are many different causes of this disappointment (including, perhaps, some unrealistic expectations regarding the role of international assistance in rebuilding war-torn societies and the speed with which this task can be accomplished) a number of common problems can be identified. With the recent eruption of internal conflicts in several different parts of the world, there is an urgent need to address these problems and to formulate more effective approaches to the task of post-war reconstruction.

Post-conflict reconstruction

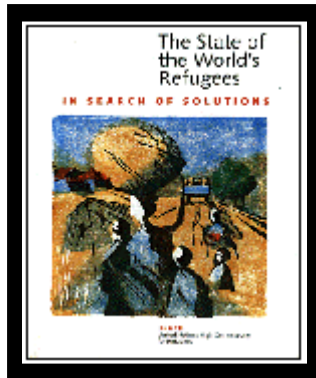
The task of reconstruction in post-conflict situations involves a number of unaccustomed and politically sensitive tasks, such as demobilization, demilitarization and demining. As noted earlier, in Rwanda, the reestablishment of the judicial system, the improvement of prison facilities and the provision of vehicles and office equipment for government departments have also been widely recognized as urgent needs. But they have not been met sufficiently quickly, because donors are wary of giving support to the government of a deeply divided country, and because such tasks do not fit neatly within the mandate of any single UN agency.

A degree of pragmatism and flexibility is evidently required in such situations, as was shown when the UN peacekeepers in Rwanda undertook to distribute test papers to all of the country's school students - a function which the Security Council had evidently not envisaged when authorizing the force's deployment! At the same time, a clear set of priorities is needed when UN organizations solicit rehabilitation resources from the donor states. The presentation of 'agency shopping lists', with little or no indication of which demands are the most pressing, can easily undermine the credibility of a fund-raising effort.

Donor states and aid organizations have too often concentrated their resources on relatively short-term activities. Ceasefires and peace agreements often attract large amounts of external assistance, as do high-profile activities such as refugee repatriation programmes. During the UN peace-plan operation in Cambodia, for example, dozens of humanitarian organizations with millions of dollars at their disposal established programmes in the west of the country, where many returning returnees wished to settle. But other parts of the country, where the social and economic needs were just as pressing, were largely neglected by the outside world.

When large amounts of external assistance are pumped into weak states over a relatively short period of time, there is an inevitable tendency for local structures to be by-passed and undermined. In the rush to establish programmes and implement projects, it is often easiest for experienced international agencies to assume such responsibilities directly, rather than working through weak indigenous institutions. At the same time, by offering salaries and career opportunities which are vastly better than any national body can hope to provide, foreign agencies frequently deprive government departments and local enterprises of their most able staff. Hard-pressed governments, anxious not to jeopardize their relations with donor states, often find it difficult to resist this trend. As a result, local actors frequently have little or no voice in deciding what assistance a country receives, to which activities it is allocated and how it is administered.

Finally, there is now a recognition that post-conflict recovery is a multifaceted task, requiring coordinated action in the social, economic, political and military fields. But the international financial institutions which play such an important role in determining the economic policies of low-income and conflict-affected countries have not been drawn sufficiently into this process. As a growing number of analysts are now asking, can such states be expected to manage the triple transition from war to peace, from dictatorship to democracy and from centralized to market economies without experiencing new forms of social conflict and political instability? Without a satisfactory response to this question, there is a real danger that countries which are struggling to shake off the effects of war and to restart the development process will again find themselves caught up in a cycle of violence, poverty and mass displacement.



The State of The World's Refugees in search of solutions

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Box 4.1 Guatemala: going back to the land

Issues relating to the use and ownership of land form an important but neglected element of the refugee problem in many parts of the world. As the case of Guatemala demonstrates, conflicts over the distribution of land and the wealth which it produces may contribute to the violence which forces people to abandon their homes and seek sanctuary elsewhere. And without a resolution of such conflicts, it may prove difficult for the refugees concerned to go back and reintegrate in their homeland.

At the beginning of 1995, UNHCR was providing protection and assistance to over 42,000 Guatemalan refugees in the Mexican states of Campeche, Chiapas and Quintana Roo. Many more Guatemalan citizens are living unofficially in Mexico, the USA and other Central American countries.

The Guatemalan exodus cannot be explained in terms of a single cause, involving as it does a complex mixture of political, economic and social factors, at both the national and regional levels. Any analysis of the conflict which provoked the departure of so many refugees and migrants must nevertheless grant a central role to the question of social inequality.

The distribution of land has always been a central issue in modern Central American politics, and nowhere more so than in Guatemala. According to many estimates, between 65 and 70 per cent of the country's arable land is owned by little more than two per cent of the population, almost exclusively of European ancestry, while around 15 per cent of the land is shared amongst more than 85 per cent of the country's peasant farmers, most of them indigenous people.

While the concentration of wealth and political power in Guatemala is not of recent origin, this characteristic of the country was exacerbated between the 1950s and 1970s, when both the economy and the population expanded rapidly. As a result of these developments, the proportion of the country controlled by large landowners,

agricultural corporations and the military increased, while the size of the average peasant farm and the fertility of its land diminished. A growing number of peasants consequently became landless, or were obliged to supplement their agricultural income by seasonal labour and petty trade. Pressures to redress such inequalities through land reform and political change were resisted by the country's ruling elite, with the support of the armed forces.

In the 1960s and 1970s, a number of radical movements began to articulate the grievances of the rural poor and to challenge the state by means of guerilla warfare and urban terrorism. This in turn prompted the authorities to launch a rigorous counterinsurgency campaign, intended to deprive the rebels of any popular support. As the conflict escalated, a growing proportion of the rural population were subjected to human rights violations or found themselves caught in the crossfire between the government forces and guerillas. As well as provoking the refugee movement into Mexico, the conflict is believed to have displaced up to half a million people within Guatemala.

Reasons to return

Although no peace accord has yet been signed between the government and guerillas, the Guatemalan refugees in Mexico have been returning to their homeland in substantial numbers. Approximately 10,000 repatriated in 1993 and 1994, and it is anticipated that up to 10,000 more will go back during 1995. The majority of these repatriation movements have taken place under the auspices of UNHCR.

Three principal considerations appear to have influenced the refugees' decision to go home. First, despite the continuation of the armed conflict and other forms of political violence, the situation in Guatemala is now more conducive to repatriation than it had been in the past. Armed conflicts elsewhere in the region have been resolved, a number of preliminary accords have been signed between the Guatemalan government and guerillas, and the military's counterinsurgency campaign has been substantially reduced.

In addition, several agreements have been reached on the terms and conditions of the refugees' return from Mexico. In October 1992, the government and representatives of the refugee population agreed that the issue of access to land should be resolved prior to repatriation, that the returnees would be temporarily exempt from military service, and that the homeward movement should be monitored by UNHCR and other international bodies. As the result of a March 1994 agreement, the United Nations has also established a Verification Mission in Guatemala to monitor human rights during the peace negotiations.

A second consideration in the refugees' decision to return derives from the difficulties of life in Mexico. The Guatemalan exiles have a weak legal status, do not have land of their own, and their economic fortunes have suffered in recent years as the result of a drought and a slump in coffee prices. Since the beginning of 1994, the refugees' life has been further disrupted by an Indian uprising in Chiapas state and by subsequent clashes between the rebels and the Mexican armed forces.

Political and cultural factors form the third element in the refugees' decision to go back to Guatemala. Many of the exiles have developed a greater interest in the future of their country as a result of their displacement, and they are now keen to return and to participate in the political process. In addition, the refugees have expressed a desire to be reunited with their families, to go back to their own land and to prevent their children from losing their distinct cultural identity. More than half of the refugees are under 15 years of age, a statistic which explains why recent repatriation movements have not led to a significant reduction in the Guatemalan refugee population.

Overcoming the constraints

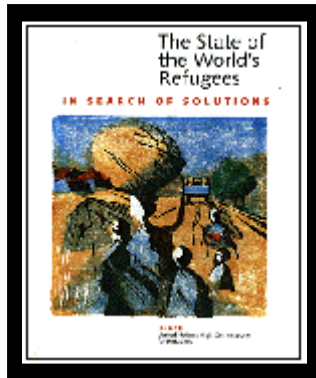
Although the majority of the refugees in Mexico have expressed a desire to go back to Guatemala, the repatriation and reintegration process is confronted with several obstacles. Some refugees cannot return to their land because of the continued conflict in their areas of origin, or because their farming plot has been taken over by someone else. A proportion of the refugees were landless when they left the country, while others feel that it will be impossible to support their enlarged families on the small and infertile plots which they left behind. Some of the refugees are also reluctant to go back to isolated locations, where prices are high, credit facilities poor and access to social services and markets is difficult. Despite the provisions of the 1992 agreement, the release of land and the transfer of legal titles to the returnees has fallen behind the repatriation schedule and delayed the homeward movement.

In an attempt to address these constraints, UNHCR is helping individual refugees and community representatives to undertake 'land visits' to Guatemala, enabling them to negotiate the purchase of new tracts of land and to reclaim the farms they once owned. The Guatemalan government, represented by the National Fund for Peace, provides credits for this purpose.

At the same time, UNHCR has launched a programme of small-scale projects in the principal returnee areas, intended to promote food security, revive local economic activity, rehabilitate community services and to foster a climate of reconciliation between returnees, displaced people and resident populations. By the beginning of 1995, more than 90 projects had been completed in four provinces bordering Mexico, at a cost of some US\$2.7 million. As in any repatriation and reintegration programme, however, the outcome of this process will depend upon the ability of the Guatemalan government and people to pursue the broader goals of social justice, democratization and equitable development.

Map H
The Mexico/Guatemala repatriation programme





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Box 4.2 Trees and refugees

In a continent which is noted for its liberal asylum policies, the Central African state of Malawi stands out as one of the most generous. Despite its small size, weak economy and limited amount of agricultural land, Malawi hosted more than a million refugees from neighbouring Mozambique throughout the late 1980s and the first half of the 1990s.

By respecting such high humanitarian standards, however, Malawi has also paid a high environmental price. During their time in the country, the Mozambicans depended on locally cut timber for almost all of their cooking, construction and heating needs. According to one estimate, the wood consumed by the refugees required about 20,000 hectares of forest to be cut down each year.

The problem of deforestation in Malawi is not linked exclusively to the refugee presence. The country's 4.6 million hectares of woodland are being used up at the rate of around 3.5 per cent a year, partly because local villagers also rely on timber for most of their domestic needs, and partly because the drying process used by the tobacco industry, Malawi's biggest foreign exchange earner, requires large amounts of fuelwood.

The loss of Malawi's forest cover has added to the country's other environmental and economic difficulties. Malawi is a densely populated country, with the number of inhabitants growing at the rapid rate of 3.5 per cent per year. It is also a overwhelmingly agrarian country, where more than 50 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line. To raise more food, forests are being replaced by farm land and hillsides are being cleared of vegetation. With large numbers of trees and shrubs being cut down in this way, serious soil erosion has taken place, leading in turn to flooding and subsidence.

In 1988, at a time when large numbers of Mozambicans were fleeing the war in their homeland, UNHCR established a programme to replace 10,000 hectares of trees in Malawi - a goal which has nearly been accomplished. Instead of attempting to replace every tree used by the refugee population, the programme has targeted a number of areas where the problem of deforestation is particularly serious. At the same time, UNHCR has been assisting the Malawian authorities to develop the skills

and capacity they need to manage the country's forests, conserve water, stabilize the soil, reforest the land and raise the level of environmental awareness among the local population.

Preventive strategy

In the Himalayan kingdom of Nepal, which has been home to some 85,000 exiled Bhutanese in recent years, UNHCR and its partners are also attempting to combine the replacement of trees which have already been felled with longer-term strategies intended to limit the environmental impact of the refugee population.

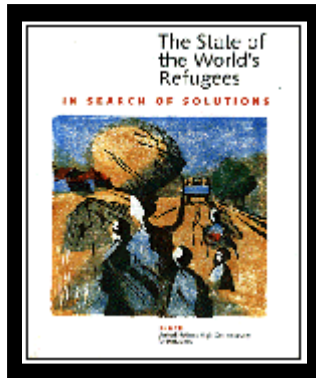
To reduce their level of fuelwood consumption - which amounted to approximately 400 kilos per capita a year - UNHCR provided the Bhutanese with kerosene stoves and fuel. And to enhance compliance with the country's tree harvesting regulations, UNHCR is providing funding for forestry patrols and supporting public education campaigns. Simultaneous efforts are also being made to strengthen Nepal's forestry department, by training local staff to produce land use maps, to undertake environmental impact assessments and to make use of modern reforestation techniques.

There is now a consensus amongst relief organizations that environmental protection should begin in the emergency phase of a refugee influx. In reality, however, the urgent need to provide food, water and shelter for thousands of new arrivals has too often relegated ecological concerns to a very low rank on the list of priorities. And while there are hundreds of humanitarian organizations around the world with expertise in functions such as logistics, sanitation, camp management and health care, far fewer agencies can claim the same kind of knowledge and experience in the environmental sector. UNHCR itself appointed an environmental coordinator just three years ago, with the primary objective of ensuring that ecological considerations are built into the organization's planning, implementation and monitoring procedures.

The Rwanda crisis of 1994 put this approach to a major test. During the emergency phase of the operation in Tanzania, several environmental specialists were sent to the field, all of whom confirmed the need for immediate action to conserve the forest cover in areas affected by the influx.

A fuel-efficient stove made from local clay was developed, and its construction taught in the camps. Over 400,000 trees were marked, so that refugees and local residents knew which ones they could cut, and guards were employed to enforce these harvesting regulations. In the meantime, experts undertook a series of surveys and field tests to find an alternative source of fuel, finally deciding that peat from papyrus swamps would be the best substitute for timber. Arrangements were subsequently made for this peat to be collected, transported and distributed to the refugees.

As the examples of Malawi, Nepal and Tanzania suggest, the search for solutions to the problem of human displacement cannot simply focus on the welfare of refugees. It must also give due regard to the land on which they settle, the natural resources they consume and the local populations affected by their presence.



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Box 4.3 Refugees and the local economy in Zambia

Refugees need not be a burden on their local hosts, but can make a positive contribution to the economy in the areas where they settle. That is the lesson to be learned from Ukwimi in south-east Zambia, where more than 20,000 exiled Mozambicans were settled in the late 1980s.

After fleeing from the war in their homeland, the Mozambican refugees initially took up residence in the border area of Zambia. But after they and their local hosts had been subjected to a number of cross-border attacks by armed Mozambican rebels, UNHCR and the Zambian government agreed to establish an entirely new refugee settlement at Ukwimi, a safe distance from the frontier.

International assistance

The refugees' arrival had a galvanizing effect on Ukwimi, a sparsely populated area which had been in economic decline since the 1960s. Substantial amounts of international assistance became available, much of it channeled through UNHCR, allowing roads to be built and schools, health centres, training workshops and agricultural extension services to be established. All of these facilities were available for use by both the Mozambicans and local Zambians.

Providing the infrastructure needed to support and service the new refugee settlement generated hundreds of manual jobs for refugees and Zambians alike, as well as a smaller number of salaried posts with the relief and development agencies which were attracted to the area by the refugees' presence. As a result, the local economy benefited from a much-needed injection of cash, while demand increased for the goods and services produced in and around Ukwimi.

The construction of a 65-kilometre road from Ukwimi to the district capital of Petauke, as well as a network of feeder roads to the settlement areas, had a particularly positive impact on local economic activity. With the transport links improved in this way, it became much easier for refugees and local people to market the farm and craft goods which they produced. At the same time, the rapid increase

in Ukwimi's population, coupled with the area's improved accessibility, made it worthwhile for traders to sell consumer goods and agricultural inputs which had previously been difficult or impossible to purchase in the locality.

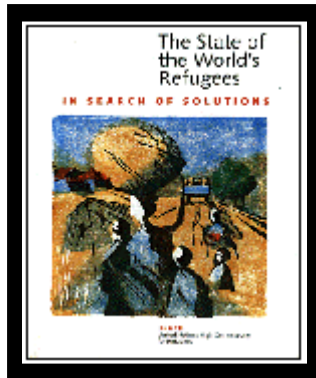
Farming land

Each refugee household settled at Ukwimi was provided with a two-hectare plot of farming land, as well as seeds, tools and a two-year supply of food, by which time they were expected to be self-sufficient. By 1992, most of the Mozambican households had attained this objective, while some were expanding their productive capacity by introducing rice farming and vegetable growing in valley areas known as dambos, a practice which the local residents soon copied.

Inevitably, perhaps, some competition developed between the Mozambicans and Zambians over the use of the dambos and the consumption of natural resources such as bamboo, reeds, game and fish. But this was offset by the mutually beneficial transactions which took place between members of the two communities. Local residents were able to hire refugees for agricultural labour, while the Mozambicans willingly traded relief items such as clothing and cooking oil for crops and seeds which were not included in their assistance package. As a result of the area's economic revitalization, a growing number of Zambians began to settle near Ukwimi, some of them former residents who had left the area and moved to an urban centre.

The success of the Ukwimi settlement initially left an important question unanswered. Now that they enjoyed a high degree of physical security and economic self-sufficiency, would the Mozambicans ever be prepared to go back to their homeland, a country which had been devastated by years of conflict? The refugees' response to this question was a positive one. Like 1.6 million of their compatriots, the Mozambicans in Ukwimi opted to return to Mozambique once it became clear that peace had been restored to their homeland.

The repatriation movement from Zambia began in October 1993, and the final UNHCR convoy left Ukwimi on 5 December 1994, emptying the settlement of refugees. Many of the departing Mozambicans sold their surplus maize crop to the World Food Programme, which enabled them to purchase some of the items they need to reestablish themselves in Mozambique. The settlement itself is being handed over to the Zambian government, which has expressed an interest in using the site for refugees and asylum seekers from other countries, as well as retired government employees and other Zambians in need of farming land.



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Box 4.4 The challenge of reintegration in Mozambique

Signed in October 1992, the Mozambican peace agreement ended a 16-year civil war which had uprooted about a quarter of the country's 16.5 million people. With the resolution of the longstanding conflict between the Frelimo government and Renamo opposition movement, the stage was set for one of the most ambitious repatriation movements and reintegration programmes ever witnessed in Africa.

The task confronting UNHCR was straightforward enough: to help Mozambique's refugees to go home in time to participate in the country's first multiparty elections, scheduled for October 1994. But the circumstances in which the repatriation had to take place could hardly have been more difficult.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, around 1.7 million people fled from Mozambique, forming the largest refugee population in Africa and the third largest - after the Afghans and Palestinians - in the world. Distributed amongst six different countries of asylum (Malawi, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe) they were now going back to a country whose infrastructure and social fabric had been ripped apart by years of war, destabilization and drought.

Contingency planning

By the time of the peace agreement, agricultural production had come to a standstill in many areas of Mozambique, which had become dependent on food aid for more than three-quarters of its cereal needs. In addition to the refugees, about four million people had been displaced within the country, many of them small-scale farmers who had sought sanctuary in the relative safety of the urban areas.

Although UNHCR had a well-established presence in the capital city of Maputo and in the northern province of Tete, many of the areas most seriously affected by mass population displacements had remained off-limits to the organization as a result of the war. Contingency planning for the repatriation and reintegration programme had therefore not been easy.

Despite the length and brutality of the Mozambican conflict and the very real fear that the peace accord might not be sustained, the refugees proved eager to go home. In the first three months which followed the signing of the agreement, UNHCR and the Mozambican authorities registered just over 180,000 returnees. In 1993 the figure amounted to 590,000, and during 1994, the refugees returned at an average rate of some 17,000 a week - just under 880,000 for the 12-month period.

When planning the repatriation programme with the authorities in Maputo and the six asylum countries, UNHCR had concluded that the refugees should make their own way home wherever possible. Many of the exiles in Malawi, for example, were living in settlements close to the Mozambican border, and so only the elderly, infirm and others with special needs had to be provided with transport.

Financial considerations played an important part in this decision. With funds for the operation limited, every dollar saved on transporting refugees from their countries of asylum enabled additional resources to be devoted to the more challenging task of reintegration and rehabilitation within Mozambique. By the end of February 1995, around 310,000 of the 1.6 million returnees had participated in organized repatriation movements, primarily by road, but also by train (from South Africa and Swaziland), by barge (across the Shire river from Malawi) and by boat (via the Indian Ocean from Tanzania).

As indicated in the accompanying map, practically every part of Mozambique was affected by the influx of returnees. As a result, UNHCR was obliged to establish offices the length and breadth of the country, while the organization's staff members worked round the clock to establish transit centres for the new arrivals and to ensure that food distribution centres were functioning in the remote and inaccessible areas to which many were returning.

Given the scale of the influx and the extent of the devastation within Mozambique, reintegration and rehabilitation activities had to be initiated at the same time. Many of the refugees living in the border areas of Malawi had been able to maintain small farms on the Mozambican side of the border and to make some preparations for the day when they were ready to return. But refugees who had fled to other countries of asylum and who had been accommodated in settlements some distance from the frontier did not enjoy the same advantage.

If they returned to their areas of origin and found them to be lacking in all services, amenities and infrastructure, there was a danger that they would either go back to their country of asylum or join the population of displaced people in the urban areas. In neither case could the refugees be said to have found a solution to their plight.

Stabilizing the population

While definitive assessments of the programme cannot be made at this early stage, by mid-1995, efforts to stabilize the population in the returnee areas of Mozambique and to avert a backflow to the neighbouring states appeared to have been successful. UNHCR's contribution to this process has taken the form of a US\$100 million reintegration programme, targeted at districts with high concentrations of returnees and displaced people.

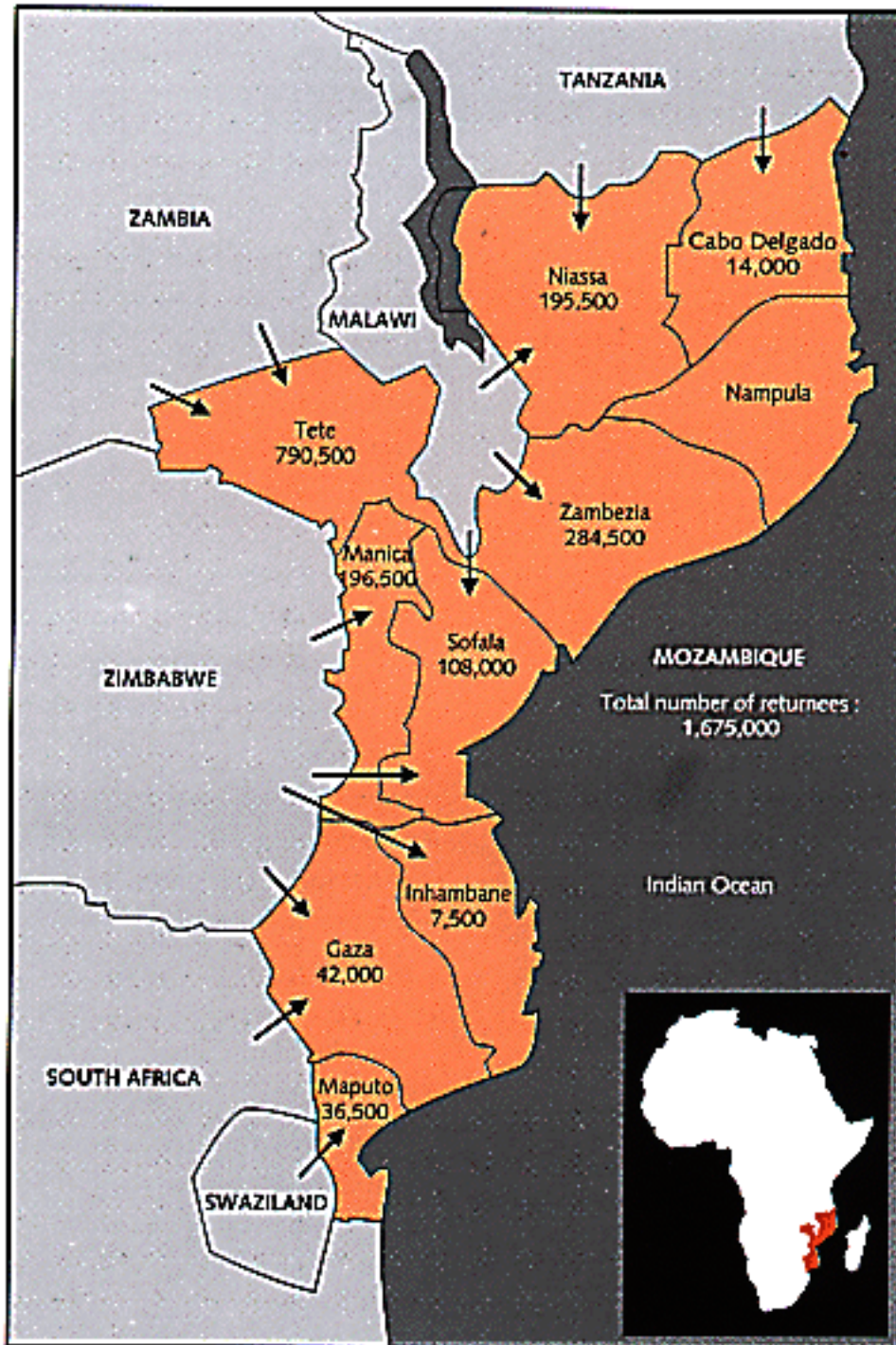
In 1994, the organization completed almost 500 community-based rehabilitation projects, intended to restore basic services in sectors such as health and education, to improve the availability of clean water, and to make remote areas more accessible through the construction and repair of roads and bridges. In 1995, it is hoped that twice as many projects will be implemented, enabling UNHCR to phase out of the operation early in 1996.

While physical reconstruction has an important role to play in the process of returnee reintegration, efforts are also needed to reactivate the local economy and to promote food security. This has been a particularly important issue in Mozambique, given the high proportion of returnees (well over 90 per cent) who are going back to the land, the limited opportunities they had to practice agriculture during their time as refugees, and the damaging impact of the war and recent periods of drought on the rural environment.

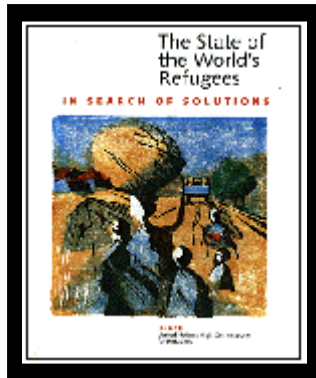
It is for these reasons that the UNHCR Mozambique reintegration programme has placed a high priority on the distribution of agricultural inputs to returnees, displaced people, demobilized soldiers and other needy groups. By the beginning of 1995, UNHCR had distributed more than 900,000 tools, as well as 190,000 seed kits to the population. Given the variety of climates and soils to be found in the principal returnee areas, UNHCR and the Department of Agriculture have paid special attention to the composition of these kits. Thus in dry areas, beneficiaries are being helped to grow drought-resistant crops such as sorghum and millet, while in areas with greater rainfall, the emphasis has been placed on maize and beans.

While the reintegration programme proceeds, efforts are also being made to repatriate the remaining groups of Mozambican refugees in the region --under 100,000 people in mid-1995. An equal if not greater number of Mozambicans are to be found in South Africa, the majority of whom currently wish to benefit from the wage-earning opportunities which exist in that country.

Map I
Repatriation to Mozambique



Statistics dated March 1995



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Box 4.5 Conflict and reconstruction in Afghanistan

Prior to the Soviet intervention of 1979, Afghanistan was already one of the world's poorer states. Today, after 15 years of war and the displacement of more than a third of the population, the country finds itself in the very lowest reaches of the development league.

Life expectancy in Afghanistan is now barely 43 years. The literacy rate of around 20 per cent and under-five and maternal mortality rates are among the highest in the world. According to the UN Development Programme, per capita food production fell by almost 30 per cent between 1980 and 1991, leaving the Afghan people able to meet only three-quarters of their daily calorie requirements. During the same period, Afghanistan became the world's largest recipient of arms in relation to the size of its population.

Although the Soviet armed forces withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989, it was not until April 1992 that the government which they had kept in power was finally ousted and replaced by an Islamic administration. This change in government was quickly followed by the return of 1.5 million refugees, some five million of whom had taken refuge in Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran. But fighting amongst competing political factions soon erupted in and around the capital city of Kabul, which had remained an island of relative peace throughout the Soviet war. A new spate of internal displacements and refugee movements took place, imposing additional burdens on UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations which were struggling to cope with the returnee influx.

Lack of stability

With some 2.8 million of them living outside of their own country, the Afghans are still the world's largest refugee population. Despite the continued lack of stability within their homeland, there is considerable evidence to suggest that many refugees remain in exile to safeguard their economic and social welfare, rather than their physical security. In their countries of asylum, the Afghans have had access to schools, health services, electricity, safe drinking water, markets and income-earning opportunities - few of which can be found in Afghanistan, particularly the remote rural areas from which many of the remaining refugees originate. In such

circumstances, there may be little incentive for refugees to repatriate, other than the desire to live within their own country and community.

The reconstruction of Afghanistan's infrastructure and economy is therefore doubly important: first, to promote the repatriation of those refugees who have stayed in their country of asylum; and second, to ensure that those who repatriate are able to stay there, leading productive lives and reintegrating with other members of the population. With the Afghan refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran now under some pressure to repatriate, there are particular concerns about the need to expand the absorptive capacity of areas in the west of the country where a major returnee influx is anticipated.

While the benefits to be gained from a comprehensive programme of reconstruction are evident enough, so are the obstacles which stand in the way of this objective. Since the time of the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, Afghanistan has slipped down the international agenda, eclipsed by a succession of humanitarian emergencies in other parts of the world. Confronted with the country's continued instability, donor states are reluctant to allocate large amounts of aid to Afghanistan.

At an operational level, the on-going conflict has also imposed some significant constraints on those relief and development organizations which have succeeded in raising funds for programmes in Afghanistan. Like many other agencies, UNHCR has been unable to maintain a fully-fledged office in Kabul since 1992, and has on a number of occasions been obliged to evacuate or relocate its staff as a result of security problems.

Productive activity

Despite all of these difficulties, UNHCR's recent experience in Afghanistan has demonstrated that repatriation and reconstruction efforts can proceed in the absence of a stable national government. Although fighting has continued in and around Kabul, many of the rural areas have remained relatively peaceful, enabling a wide range of rehabilitation activities to be undertaken in recent years. These include, for example, demining, the repair of irrigation channels, the provision of seeds and other agricultural inputs, the improvement of village-to-market access roads, and the installation of shallow wells and handpumps to provide safe drinking water. As a result of such activities, fields which had been abandoned for a decade or more are once again producing wheat, fruit and other crops. According to the UN Development Programme, over 90 per cent of the population are now engaged in productive activity.

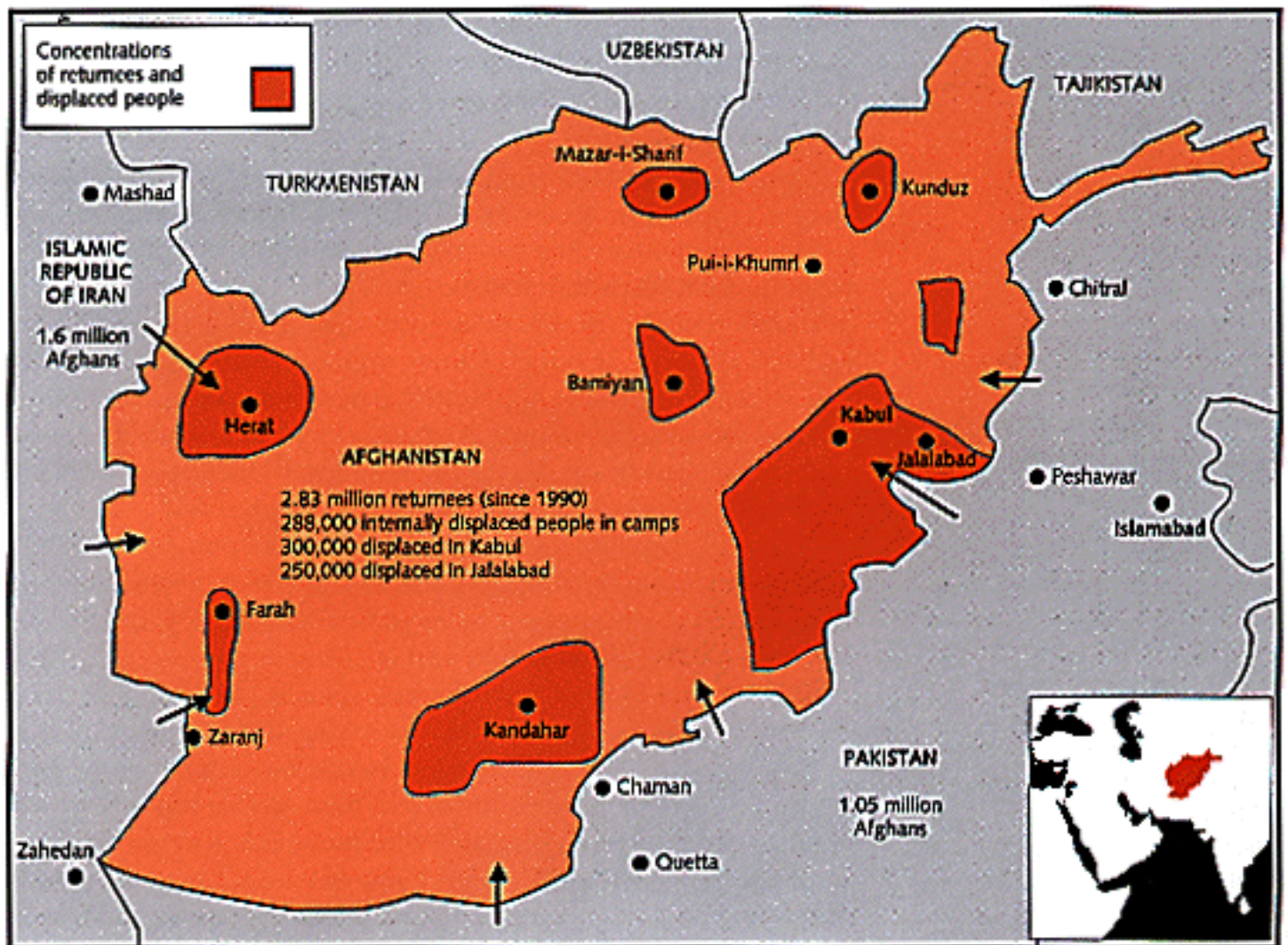
By increasing its presence and activities in key areas of the country (both rural and urban), UNHCR believes that it can contribute to the stabilization process and help to establish viable living conditions for the Afghan population. Indeed, such initiatives are a prerequisite for the repatriation and reintegration of the 2.8 million Afghans - some 20 per cent of the country's total population - who remain in exile.

Experience has demonstrated, however, that there is no necessary correlation between rehabilitation and return; in some parts of the country, reconstruction activities were initiated as a means of promoting repatriation, but the homeward movement was blocked by other factors, such as land tenure disputes or tribal, ethnic and religious differences. As a result, the focus of UNHCR's activities has

shifted to areas where repatriation is already underway, where returnees and other local residents can be the driving force of the rehabilitation process and a leading partner in the identification, planning and implementation of projects.

The need to support the choices of returnees and other beneficiaries, rather than imposing priorities upon them, is particularly important in a country such as Afghanistan, which is characterized by strong communal loyalties and an entrepreneurial culture. Recognizing the realities of the situation within their homeland, the Afghan refugees in Pakistan have developed their own repatriation strategies, designed to facilitate the reintegration process and to maximize their options. Thus in any given refugee household or community, some of the men may go back to Afghanistan to prepare the land and rebuild their houses, while others work for wages in Karachi or the Gulf States, leaving the women and children in the social and material safety of the refugee camps. Given the uncertain conditions of life in Afghanistan, such strategies are a positive sign of the refugees' interest in returning to their own country.

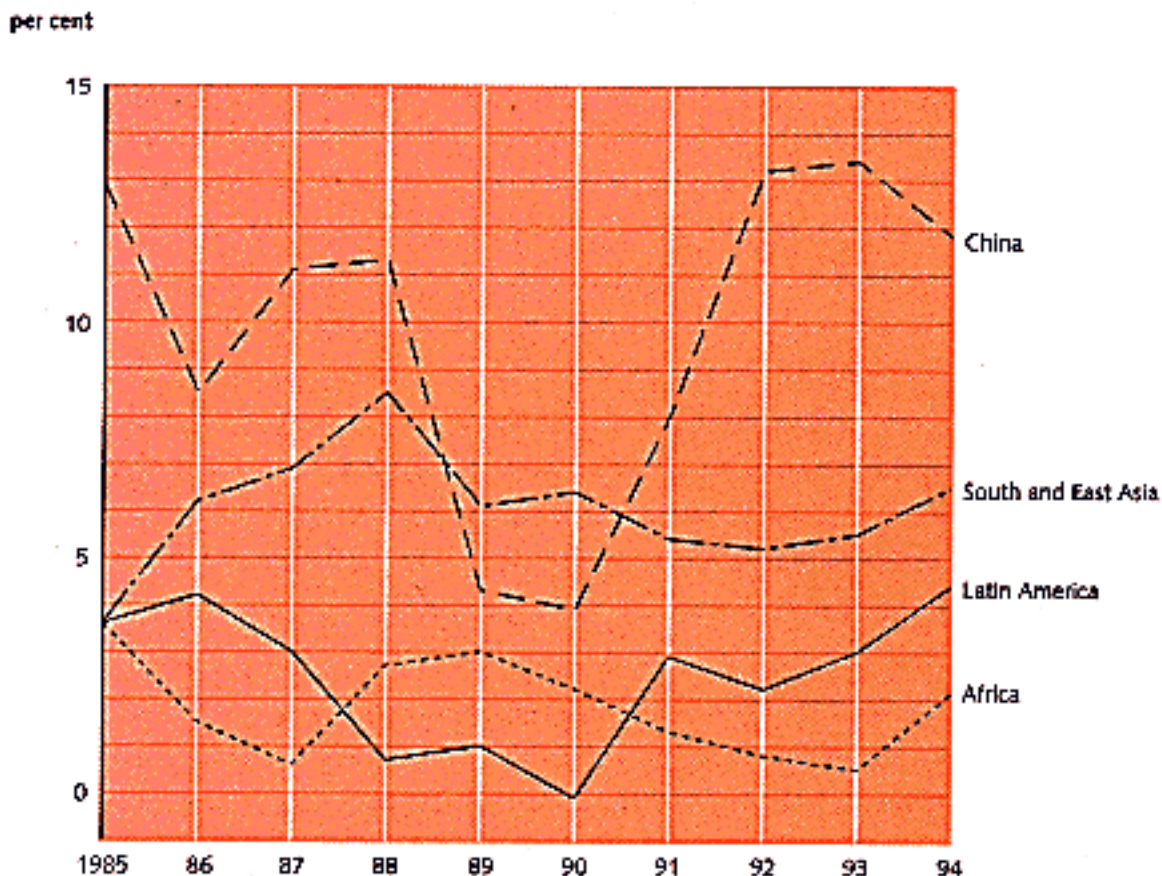
Map J
Displaced Afghans



Statistics dated January 1995.

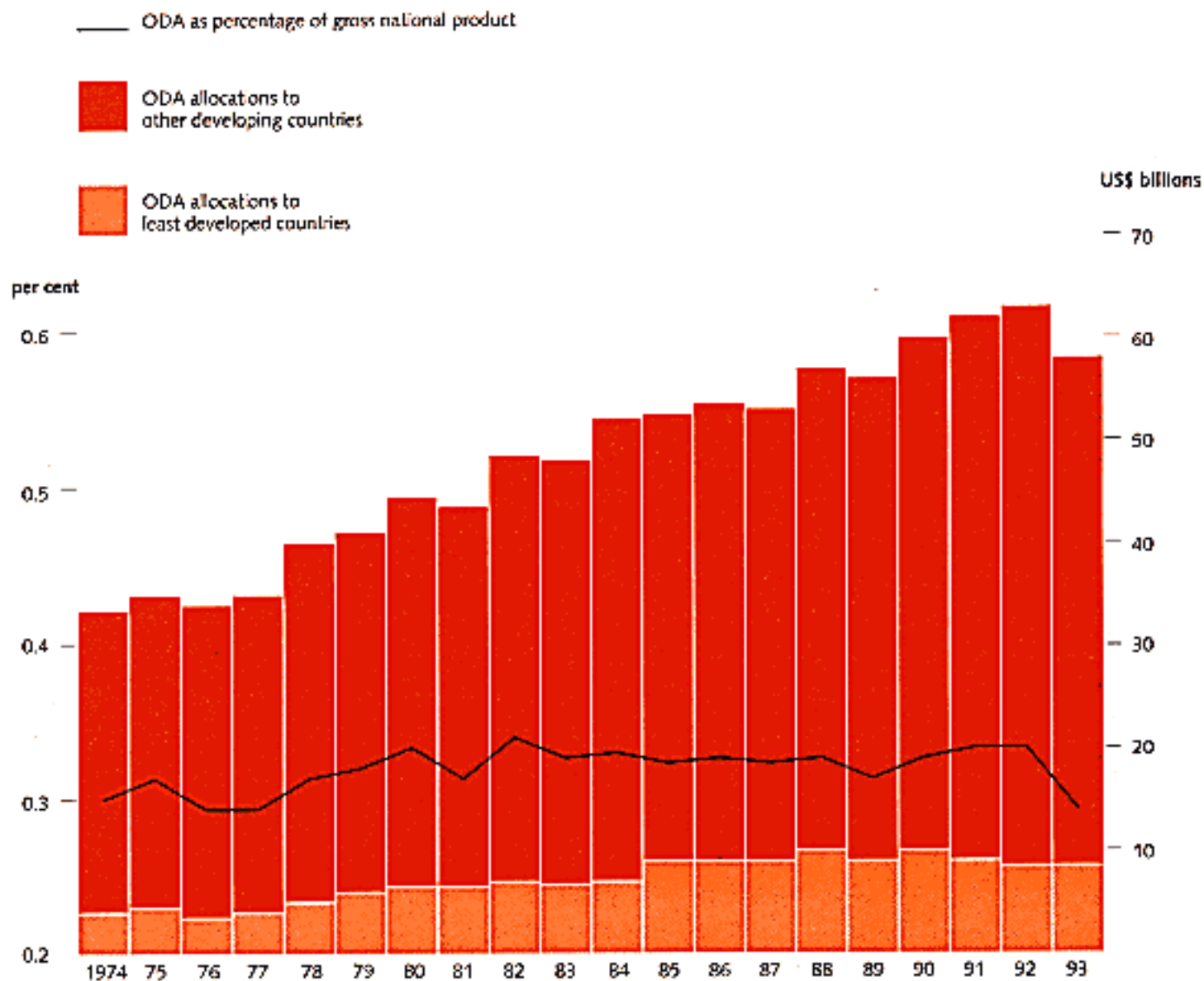
Fig. 4.1

Rates of economic growth in selected regions, 1985-1994



Statistics refer to annual percentage change in real Gross Domestic Product.

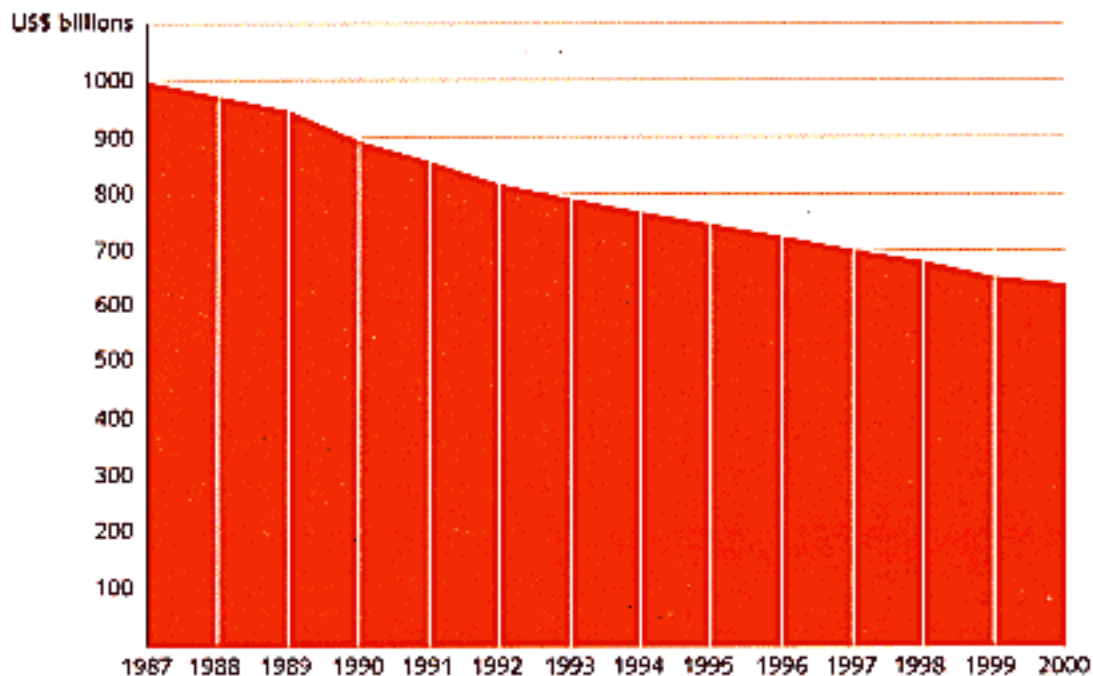
Fig. 4.2
Official development assistance, 1974-1993



Statistics refer to assistance provided by members of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, measured in US\$ billions at 1992 prices.

Fig. 4.3

Actual and projected global military spending, 1987-2000



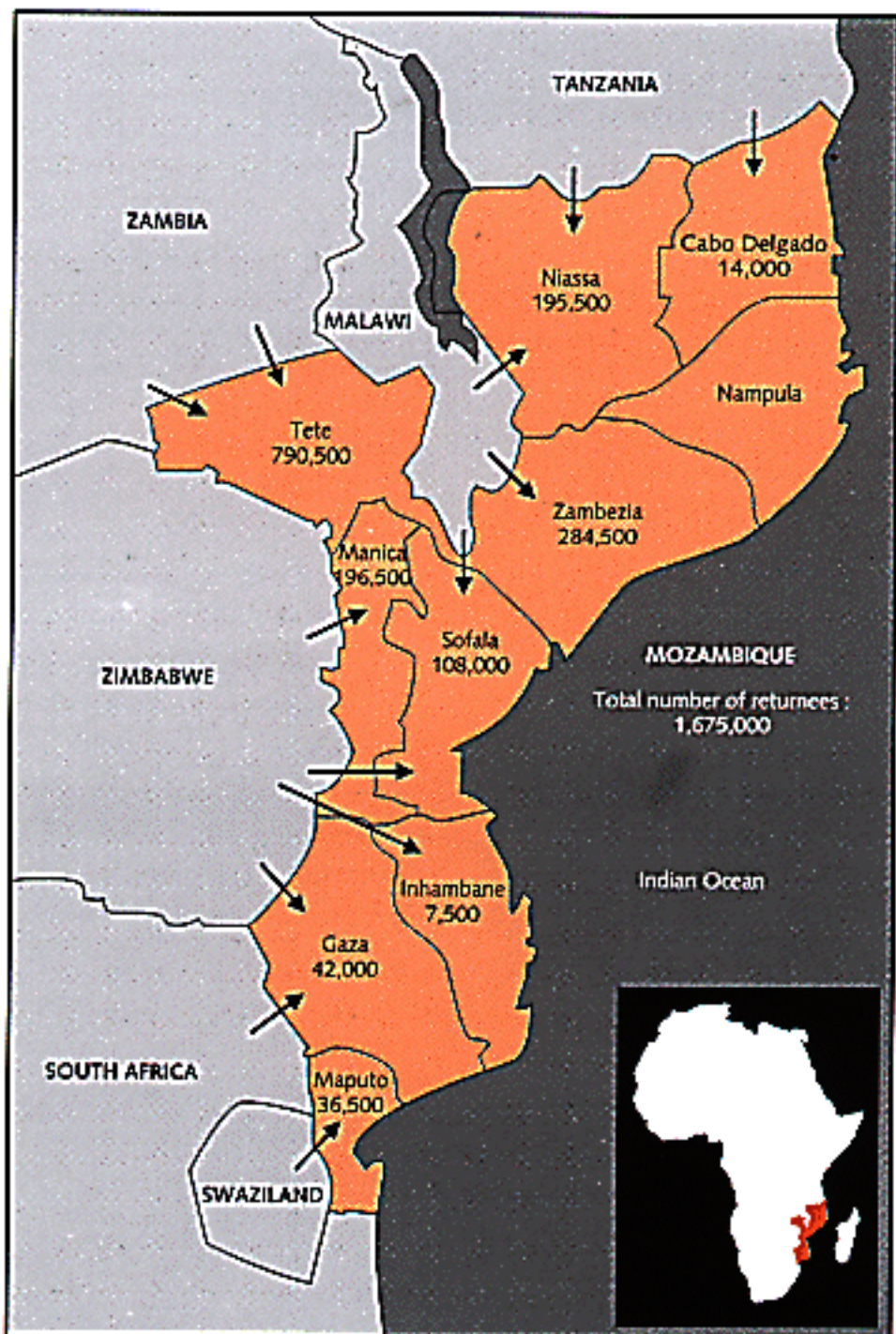
Estimates for 1993-1994 and projections for 1995-2000 provided by UNDP.

Map H

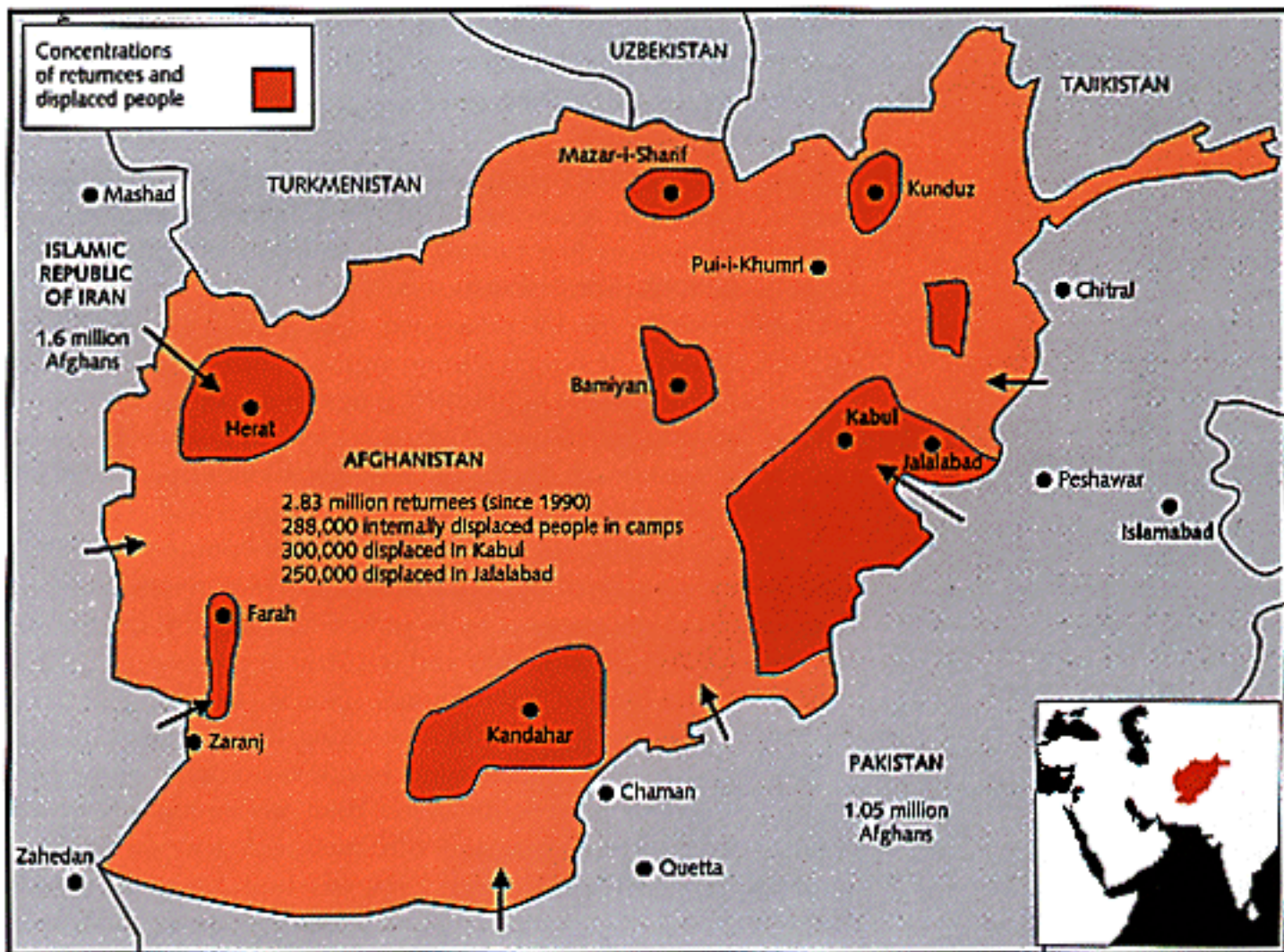
The Mexico/Guatemala repatriation programme



Map I Repatriation to Mozambique



Map J Displaced Afghans





Taldı Kurgan Province, Kazakhstan: ethnic Kazakhs who have arrived from Mongolia, June 1995
© UNHCR/A. Hollmann



An environmental protection project for Afghan refugees and local villagers in Baluchistan, Pakistan, April 1990

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