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LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES
AND FOOD SECURITY
IN REFUGEE CAMPS

Thesis

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“We have to see human beings as agents who can think and act, not just as patients who have needs that require catering.”

(Amartya Sen)
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Livelihood Strategies & Food Security in Refugee Camps

Introduction
The last ten years have witnessed the widespread acceptance of the multidimensionality of poverty that encompasses not just low income, but also vulnerability, insecurity and “voicelessness”. Very often, being a refugee involves all three dimensions, highlighting that refugees are not only without national protection, but also poor.

During the past few decades the main focus of the international humanitarian response in refugee camps has been to stress assistance at the expense of protection, mostly in the initial emergency stage, where physical assistance is given priority over protection concerns. There has been a tendency amongst humanitarian organizations to approach the themes of refugee livelihoods from a technical perspective, focusing on the effective design of development-oriented initiatives. Although this technical point of view is crucial, there is also a need to link the question of refugee livelihoods with the issues of rights and protection they should enjoy according to the international law.

Without a doubt there is increasing recognition that protection has to be much more than a juridical concept founded in international humanitarian law and often separated from the reality of humanitarian practice. However, the relationship between international protection, livelihood strategies and food security in refugee camps are sometimes unclear, and the role played by the humanitarian protection in refugee-generating situations is not properly investigated yet.

The main purpose of this study is to examine what steps refugees have been taken to develop their livelihood strategies and achieve food security while residing in camps. The paper seeks to point out how protecting and supporting livelihoods constitutes an early component of a refugee emergency response and how this approach can be instrumental in safeguarding food security, contributing to reduce relief dependency among the camp dwellers. In order to develop such assumption, many case studies have been investigated; in particular, the early literature on African refugee livelihoods has been crucial to analyse the coping strategies developed by camp dwellers in order to secure their daily survival.

2 UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has introduced the notion of the right to protection, and the Security Council has debated the scope of the international community’s obligation to protect civilians in the face of human rights violations.
In this regard, the documents gathered in the framework of the Refugee Livelihoods Project launched in May 2003 by the UNHCR’s Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit (EPAU) have represented a mostly valuable point of reference. Many refugee camps today are sometimes places of insecurity and danger, where violence and instability act as a serious constraint to the pursuit of economic activities. If it is true that camps are a safety net in the emergency phase, it is also right that, as the years go by, refugees are prevented from enjoying those rights (freedom of movement and employment) that would enable them to protect their livelihoods and food security. In the following paragraphs this paper will analyse the importance of international protection within refugee camps and its role in promoting sound standard of living, also in exceptional situations, where the establishment of camps is unavoidable.

1. Protection, livelihoods and human rights in refugee camps

In order to establish how human rights and livelihoods have been included into refugee assistance, it is necessary to start by identifying both a certain standard of treatment to which a refugee is entitled, and the core elements in a livelihoods approach applied to refugees. The international law has implicitly underlined the right to humanitarian protection in a refugee emergency is to safeguard lives and health of the people involved, paying attention to the satisfaction of their more urgent necessities like physical security, shelter, food, water and medical assistance.

3 The definition has been developed in an International Committee of Red Cross-sponsored workshop. The international instruments embedding provisions regarding the international protections are:

1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights – Article 22
1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees – Articles 23 and 24.3 [71]
1965 Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination – Article 5
1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights – Article 93 [72]
1979 Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women – Articles 11 and 14
However, a focus solely on saving lives in the very short-term is not enough, since an essential condition to achieve humanitarian protection is to analyse the relationship between the governments of host countries and the refugees\(^4\) settled in camps. These relations are deeply influenced by the refugee policies implemented by the host countries, whose role is crucial in promoting or preventing livelihood security among the camp dwellers.

A livelihoods approach in refugee camps focuses on the reasons influencing refugees strategies of living in order to meet their basic needs, but it is also particularly effective in identifying the constraints that prevent refugees from enjoying their rights as a condition for promoting their livelihoods. Hence, this approach is useful to understand why refugees have been deprived of important human rights and to what extent such constraints are functional to refugee protection while they residing in camps.

In many instances, the host countries view refugees as a security problem and thus desire that they are allowed only on a temporary basis; the consequence deriving from this trend is a limited package of social and economic rights that prevent refugees’ pursuit of livelihoods. However, notwithstanding the importance of the economic and social rights which are clearly central to achieving a sound standard of living, the most relevant right is the right to legal status of refugee, “for it is this right which will open the door to the realization of other rights”\(^5\). In refugee emergencies the refugee status is thus the component linking the humanitarian protection (whose main aim is to save lives) to livelihood support, that should preserve refugee self-sufficiency and foster their self-reliance, especially in long-lasting refugee situations (See Table 1).


Table 1

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<th>COMPONENT</th>
<th>OBJECTIVE</th>
<th>ACTIVITIES</th>
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<td>Protection</td>
<td>Saving refugee lives</td>
<td>Support livelihoods strategies</td>
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<td>Livelihood support</td>
<td>Foster refugee self-sufficiency</td>
<td>Provision of social and economic rights to refugees</td>
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<tr>
<td>Refugee status</td>
<td>Determine the entitlement to certain standard of treatment for refugees</td>
<td>Support the determination of eligibility procedures in host countries</td>
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Yet, in many developing countries there are often lengthy delays in the refugee status determination process, and such delays affect the livelihoods of asylum seekers, especially when the refugee status is associated with access to assistance and to other forms of entitlements particularly useful for refugee survival both in the short and in the long-term.

2. Defining refugee camps: a terminological and conceptual issue

According to the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR) there are currently some 5.8 million refugees hosted in camps and centres around the world. Although in the standard literature the terms *camps* and *settlements* tend to be used indifferently, there is often a leaning to define both according to the way they relate to a durable solution. For some, camp and settlement refer to two different phases in the refugee cycle, the former referring to temporary shelter, the latter to a durable solution (namely integration into the host country). Perhaps more appropriately, "camps and settlements" can be understood to cover two forms of assistance policies:

1) planned and unplanned rural settlements, which are based on various forms of officially recognized self-reliance
2) camps generally based on full assistance.

It is evident that choosing one term rather than another depends on the duration of a given refugee situation. Consequently, UNHCR's Evaluation of Policies and Analysis

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Unit has introduced the terms of *protracted refugee situations* applying to both organized settlements and camps, as long as they exist for more than five years without a distinct possibility of finding a durable solution such as voluntary repatriation, local integration or resettlement. The concept of camps covers a much wider range of situations, and except for the relatively clear distinction between planned and self-settlement, definitions of refugee situations often need objective criteria and clear demarcations. What follows are five parameters which frequently lie behind the usage of the terms *camps* or *settlements* and which provide a useful means to define refugee accommodations.

1) *Freedom of movement:* the more this is restricted, the more a refugee settlement is generally seen to assume the character of a camp.

2) *Type of livelihoods:* camp dwellers generally are allowed to deal only with limited income-generating activities, while self-settled refugees have a tendency to be more integrated into the local economy, be it with or without host country’s consent.

3) *Type of governance:* this indicates the mechanisms of decision-making within or over the refugee community.

4) *Designation as temporary locations:* the term *refugee camp* marks a group of lodging of various descriptions which, because of the poor conditions of the accommodations, are meant to provide temporary shelter.\(^8\)

5) *Population size and density:* this indicator, coupled with questions of freedom of movement and mode of livelihoods, could also be a useful means to recognize the difference between camps and settlements.

According to these five parameters, therefore, the elements characterizing camp-based solutions essentially concern the scarce freedom of movement, their limited self-reliance in order to implement whatever livelihood strategy and the marginalization caused by the separation of refugees from the local population.

Criticism of camp-based solutions focuses either on arguments that stress questions of economic or social development, or that are embedded in a rights-based approach which takes as a starting point the many restrictions on socio-economic and political freedoms that accompany camp-based refugee assistance. However, even if these characteristics are

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\(^9\) UNREF 1958.
important in order to make a distinction between camps and other types of settlements, they should themselves be subjected to greater analysis. The real question, therefore, is not distinguish a camp from a settlement, but rather, how to guarantee that camps are able to provide refugees with favourable living conditions in situations where their establishment is inevitable. It is well known that camps do not represent the ideal solution for anyone; however they can help to provide refugees with an important safety-net, serving indispensable functions especially during the first phase of emergencies. The root of the problem is to enhance the positive protective elements of camps, while attempting to down-size the negative ones, especially when refugee situations endure for many years. In this regard, in the paragraphs below the paper will analyse how camp dwellers are enabled to protect their livelihoods and food security also in protracted refugee situations.

3. Protecting livelihoods as an early component of a refugee emergency response

Refugee-generating situations are commonly defined as complex emergencies, involving an intricate net of often opposing and hostile political, economic and military forces. Unlike natural disaster, complex emergencies entail the deliberate creation of crisis. Refugee emergencies, in particular, threaten self-sufficiency of refugees, since they have left behind most of their assets and may have limited access to land, livestock, jobs and other sources of living during their time in camps. But what is livelihood in such conditions and why is it important in refugee camps? A widely accepted definition of livelihood refers to the capabilities, assets and activities required for a means of living. These assets comprise human, natural, social, physical and financial assets. For refugees hosted in camps, the livelihoods approach needs to be tailored to call attention to the vulnerability of people exposed to constant threats of violence and subject to new forms of risk that makes the pursuit of livelihood strategies much more difficult. In order to adapt this approach to conflict situations, the emphasis has been focused on the concept of vulnerability.

10 The definition was first used as a development concept in 1991 by R. Chambers and G. Conway.
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The definition of *livelihoods in conflict* developed by the researchers at the Feinstein International Famine Center at Tufts University\(^\text{12}\) refers to

> “the ways in which people access and mobilize resources that enable them to increase their economic security and thereby reduce the vulnerability created and exacerbated by conflict, and pursue goals necessary for their survival and possible return”.

According to this definition, the pursuit of livelihoods in conflict situations, thus, bases on three different elements\(^\text{13}\):

1) the main concerns of refugees and how they change over time (safety from violence, reducing economic vulnerability and food insecurity)

2) the availability, extent and combination of resources owned by refugees; these include financial resources, such as remittances, as well as the social capital that comes with refugee networks; human capital, in the form of education or skills not be present in the host community and which can enable refugees to gain economic advantage; humanitarian aid and assistance in kind, which are often translated into commodities for trade

3) the strategies used to access and mobilize such resources.

Notwithstanding the codifications made by researchers and practitioners, the international efforts usually focussed on the provision of the major necessities of refugees (construction of shelters, medical assistance, supply of water and food), usually neglecting livelihood protection.

Only during the past decade the importance of livelihoods has entered the issue of refugee assistance, playing a leading role in promoting self-sufficiency among the camp dwellers, and moving away from the former representation of refugees as vulnerable people entirely dependent on the external aid. According to a definition developed by Sue Lautze\(^\text{14}\), the concept of self-sufficiency entails

> “the capacity of a community to either produce, exchange or lay claim to resources necessary to ensure both survival trough and resilience against life-threatening stresses”.

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\(^{12}\) This definition is currently being developed by researchers at the Feinstein International Famine Centre at Tufts University. Massachusetts, USA  (http://famine.tufts.edu).


The focus is thus on the productive capacity of refugees and their contribute on the development of the areas where they are hosted. This is especially so in a large number of protracted refugee situations, where international agencies are seeking to provide assistance in addition to that required for the first stage of the emergency.

Over the past decade there has been an ongoing debate about how to plan a conceptual framework able to merge the different priorities of providing humanitarian aid and preserving a sound standard of living also in exceptional circumstances like a refugee camp. At the moment, the varieties of additional support\textsuperscript{15}, in refugee emergencies are limited to current aid design, which usually divides responses into development and emergencies programmes. However, in recent years there has been many interesting attempts by international organizations, UNHCR first, to prioritise some of their limited resources to foster self-sufficiency and productivity, rather than the current near-exclusive focus on the short-term survival of the refugees\textsuperscript{16}.

4. Livelihood strategies and food security

In the paragraph above the key-components of a livelihoods approach in conflict situations have been stressed; the refugee necessities changing over time, the resources needed to meet them and, above all, the strategies implemented to achieve livelihood security contribute to design the conceptual framework applicable to refugees living in camps.

Refugees facing a food shortage make strategic decision about how to bridge their consumption deficit. During 1980’s a number of case studies in Africa and South Asia suggested a common pattern in the nature and sequence of coping and survival strategies adopted by refugees. According to these studies, a pattern of three stages can be distinguished, each reflecting increasing desperation:

1) insurance mechanism,
2) disposal of productive assets
3) destitution behaviour (distress and migration).

\textsuperscript{15} Overseas Development Institute (ODI), Supporting Livelihoods in Situation of Chronic Political Instability. Report of the Planning Workshop held on 12\textsuperscript{th} February, 2001 at Avonmouth House, London.

Strategies that have little long-run cost are adopted first (such as drawing-down savings and calling on remittances), while strategies with long-run cost that are difficult to reverse are adopted later (for example selling the plough). Finally, survival strategies reflect economic destitution and a failure to cope (migrating off the land).

The early literature on coping strategies suffered from a weakness shared by Amartya Sen’s entitlements approach to poverty and famines, a failure to recognize consumption rationing as a routine austerity measure, reflecting an assumption that the first concern of hungry people is to rise or to protect their food consumption. Instead, it has been noted that smaller portions and cheaper diets are routinely used by refugees as an effective and relatively costless way of making limited resources go further.

Refugee households facing food shortages are forced to trade off short-term consumption needs against longer-term economic viability. These trade-offs can be illustrated as a decision tree (Figure 1), where the split between protecting or modifying food consumption reflects a harsh choice whether to dispose of key productive assets and buy food today, or hold on to these assets and go hungry in order to protect future livelihood. This suggests that coping strategies are adopted in a predictable sequence, which is determined not only by the effectiveness of the strategies in term of bridging the food gap, but also by the cost and the reversibility of each action.

The contemporary literature on coping strategies distinguishes between a food first definition of coping strategies where these behaviors are designed to maximize immediate consumption in situation of food scarcity, and a sustainable livelihood definition, which sees coping strategies as designed to preserve livelihoods.

Livelihood strategies refer to the range of activities undertaken by refugees to access and mobilize needed resources. Such activities include those that are permitted and supported by host governments and aid agencies and those that are unofficial or illegal, like prostitution or smuggling. Coping strategies are usually defined as “a short term response to an unusual food stress” and adaptation as “coping strategies which have become permanently incorporated into the normal cycle of activities”.

Much has been written about the livelihood strategies the poor people generally adopt to diversify their income-generating activities in order to minimize their dependence on a often unreliable agrarian resource base. According to a standard definition of livelihoods, three sets of resources play a leading role for poor people:
1) arable land for farming
2) transnational resources, including remittances
3) resources from international assistance, that can provide basic needs as well as opportunities for livelihoods such as direct employment, income generating activities or micro-credit.

To some extent, these elements are valid also in refugee camps, provided some distinctions are drawn. The conditions of the refugees hosted in camps are heavily influenced by the rights attached to the refugee status they have been entitled to.
The features that are common to many refugee camps are the inability of incamped population to enjoy those political, economic and social rights that may be pivotal to preserve their livelihood security. In particular, such restrictions limit the ability of refugees to engage in agricultural and income-generating activities. That is why some of the economic activities in which camp dwellers take part are illegal, like the economic exploitation of lands on which they have no ownership right, or even illicit, like stealing or prostitution.

In order to avoid such negative coping strategies, international agencies and Ngos have multiplied their attempts to capitalize on the skills and capacity already possessed by the refugees. In the following paragraphs the paper will focus on such attempts, and on the division among negative and positive coping strategies, although this distinction is somewhat artificial and frequently breaks down in practice.

5. Positive coping strategies

Agriculture

Most of the refugees living in camps are engaged in subsistence agriculture for consumption, which at times can vary in output, making them more vulnerable and in need of food assistance. In rural areas, land is the main source of livelihoods and the most precious economic resource when rural people are forcibly displaced. Refugees rely on access to common natural resources like water, forests and range land to support themselves and eventually to earn income. Wild products are either used for subsistence (especially in the initial stages of arrival), or for trade.

When refugees have the required skills, they add value by processing: for example, sawyers who turn timber into planks for construction; charcoal makers; beer brewers, and restaurateurs. Access to land and common resources is thus a key component of refugee livelihoods and of their economic productivity. In order to mobilize such resources, refugees are often constrained by the policies implemented by the host country, which restrict their freedom and mobility. In particular, access to land is limited by the traditional land tenure system and laws concerning land ownership and rights of usufruct.

In some cases, refugees have taken over arable land when farmers abandon their fields as a result of insecurity, causing resentment when owners return. In host countries where
there are tensions over land or resources, such as the Chiapas region of Mexico, refugees’ need for land can aggravate tensions and even cause conflict.

In such circumstances, the host communities will be less willing to allow refugees to use those resources, and host governments will be more likely to restrict refugees’ freedom of movement, confining them to camps. The situation is further complicated when refugees turn out to be more productive farmers than locals, able to put the land to better use and profiting from their labor. Consequent resentment can mean that local authorities are notified and called in to remove or restrict refugee activities.

Fortunately some exceptions have been recorded. In his study of Kanongesha (Western Zambia) Oliver Bakewell\textsuperscript{17} points out that, where land is abundant, the refugees were the largest land users and they could use as much land as they could cultivate. In host countries where governments have policies of settling refugees in agricultural settlements, they are utilized directly for development. This is the case of Belize, Uganda and Tanzania, where refugees have been seen as a means to develop underutilized land.\textsuperscript{18}

The Tanzanian\textsuperscript{19} case is particularly precious to understand how agriculture in refugee camps represents for refugees not only a survival strategy to get food, but also a livelihood strategy valuable when they will return to their home country.

Since 1993 Tanzania has been characterized by a consistent flow of refugees fleeing from Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Rwanda because of widespread internal conflicts degenerated into genocides. The UNHCR operates ten settlement camps in Tanzania for more than 300,000 people and the WFP has delivered food aid. But when the WFP was forced to reduce the amount of food aid to refugees, they tried to integrate their scarce ration through agriculture. In 1999 Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) joined the international relief operation by introducing a programme to improve nutritional conditions among the most vulnerable refugees.


\textsuperscript{18} In Belize, in the early 1980s, each refugee family was allocated 50-acre holdings. In Tanzania in the 1970s, each family was given a minimum of ten acres of land for farming. More recently in Uganda, the government allocated approximately 1,333 square kilometers of land for the development of settlements with the aim of allowing agricultural self-sufficiency, and to encourage local integration (UNHCR Uganda, 1996 and 1999).

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In collaboration with UNHCR, FAO provided 15,000 families in six of refugee camps with seeds and hand tools to plant small gardens. Results were and continue to be significant, as the consultants who monitored the project reported that more than 50,000 refugees have been involved and, above all, their nutritional conditions result dramatically improved.

Income generating programmes

Over the past decade income-generating programmes (IGP) have played an increasingly important role in the drive towards the economic self-reliance of refugees, and the UNHCR has sought to build partnerships with other interested actors in an attempt to create an effective transition between emergency relief and longer-term development.

IGPs use two approaches. Most common are grants-based, in which inputs such as cash, capital equipment and raw materials are provided free. A less widely used approach, sometimes combined with grants, is based on micro-finance in which a line of credit or a loan is provided for beneficiaries to start small businesses. Advocates argue that loans are better forms of aid than grants because they break the “dependency cycle” associated with humanitarian aid by encouraging a responsible use of resources and because, through loan repayments, it is possible to increase the number of future recipients.

Micro-finance approaches have been more widely attempted in post-conflict or reconstruction situations than in conflict-affected communities.20 Refugees living in camps are seen as ‘unsuitable’ candidates for micro-finance: they are temporary guests and, therefore, less likely to repay loans.

Many micro-finance-based IGPs have been curtailed in recent years, judged as failures. Their critics argue that the funds would be better used in grant form. But, as is recognized by the same critics, these arguments are often based on the financial success of the program (e.g. repayment rates), rather than on how they affect the economic security of the community. The human security consequences of deliberately injecting cash, credit or other livelihood resources into a refugee camps have not been properly evaluated.

20 Rwanda, Cambodia, Mozambique and Bosnia are the most noted examples of countries which were provided large amounts of aid to run post-conflict development or reconstruction programmes. Many of these programmes contained a micro-credit component. These programmes, in general, had two primary objectives: to help rebuild their war-torn economies and to begin healing divided communities through projects that encouraged collaborative work.
The lack of a general evaluation of IGPs means that a clear picture of their effects (positive or negative) on the economic security of refugees and their host communities is lacking. It is likely that the availability of capital equipment or loan capital for small businesses improves the ability of refugees to pursue livelihoods and food security and that the benefits trickle out to the host community.

An example of the impact of a refugee micro-credit program is the soap manufacturing venture in Kakuma camp\(^\text{21}\), on the Kenya’s Sudan border. A group of 5 refugees formed a soap manufacturing business. They soon realized their soap products had a limited market in the camp as there was a general UNHCR soap distribution to all refugees in the camp every month. In order to sustain the business, they approached an NGO, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) for support through its micro-credit program. This helped them, increase output and improve the quality of soap which soon met the requirements of the Kenya Bureau of Standards.

A small number of successful grants were extended also to congolese refugees in Basse camp\(^\text{22}\)(Gambia) as a mechanism for income-generation. Small amounts of capital, usually less than US$30, would be given to the refugees to purchase materials or equipment to start a micro-project. The Red Lion Bakery is an example of the success brought about by assistance of UNHCR. Prior to fleeing Sierra Leone, the owner had previously been employed as a baker, but the war and atrocities in his country forced him to flee to the Gambia.

The baker had been a recipient of a funding for a micro-enterprise. He used the funds to purchase materials needed for an oven and bread baking. As demand increased in and around the camp, he hired and trained other refugees to work with him. The small amount of capital granted to him allowed him to utilize his skills and improve the livelihood security of himself and others. Most refugees indicated that this money was used for seeds, tools or foodstuffs, showing how such activities have positively impacted also on their food security.


An other successful example is the Home Gardening Project (HGP) launched in 1999 in Nepal to improve refugee households’ access to food rich in micro-nutrients through the production of vegetables. The HGP was launched in two Beldangi camps (Nepal) with technical support from Helen Keller International. Following its success in these camps, the project had expanded to other six by 2001 with Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS) and Lutheran World Federation (LWF) providing the technical support. The HGP recycles empty WFP vegetable oil containers for use in planting vegetables. Participants are selected from the most vulnerable families and from user-groups, which receive training in growing various all-year-round varieties of vegetables and fruits.

The yearly budget for the gardening programmes approaches US$40,000 for the current phase (2003-2004). The home gardening projects have helped to promote the availability of different varieties of vitamin-rich food, with a particular focus on green leafy vegetables with the highest concentration of vitamins. Household yields can in fact provide up to 100 kg of additional vegetables per family per year, depending on the size of plot available.

Although UNHCR does not implement micro-finance programmes directly but engages implementing partners to administer them, these interventions are still considered to be part and parcel of an overall relief programme. This perception is shared by refugee beneficiaries, who look upon UNHCR as the supplier of discretionary assistance and would therefore find it difficult to accept hard and fast repayment rules, far less be able to comply with them. Faced with this moral hazard, UNHCR and its partners may quickly relent when, for instance, negotiating interest rates below market rates. The underlying contradiction between banking and relief also extends to the selection of beneficiaries. The clients who are most likely to benefit from IGP are those already endowed with business expertise and often enough resources to sustain themselves. By contrast, the ones who are most likely to fail with their ventures and default on their payments are precisely those whom UNHCR would want to help, the most vulnerable cases, such as widows or single mothers. This clash of business versus charity is probably

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irreconcilable in the refugee context and it often produces a veritable mismatch between intended and actual beneficiaries.

Such programmes therefore do not aim to enable refugees to become financially independent individuals. Given the prevailing conditions and the movement restrictions, anyone confined to a refugee camp is rendered automatically dependent upon some form of external aid. In any case income-generation and loan schemes do instill new professional skills in refugees, permit them to enjoy a limited degree of financial autonomy and introduce money into a poorly monetized environment\(^\text{25}\). But in the facilitation of refugee self-reliance and the promotion of sustainable livelihoods IGA are not sufficient. To be successful they need to be supported by other targeted interventions, such as business training and, most importantly, an enabling environment.

Government restrictions on refugee mobility, for instance, directly impact on market access for refugee products and may therefore constitute a much bigger obstacle than the cost of financing. IGA need to be entrenched in a comprehensive understanding of what constitutes the most viable path for self-reliance; any one of the numerous regulatory requirements (such as work permits and business licenses) can very easily nullify the prospects for what otherwise may have been a sound business proposition.

**Mobility and transnational resources**

When refugees have the possession of a refugee identity card and the easy access to passes to travel in and out of the camp, mobility and migration is an important coping strategy. Several refugees admitted to leaving the camp for extended periods of time to find employment opportunities, but many admitted to having to return to the camp in the end to avoid paying the taxes and fees that were required of any refugee wanting to work in the urban areas.

Refugees in camps and urban areas have access to remittances and social capital through transnational communities (i.e. co-nationals resettled in third countries who send money), contacts and information to friends or relatives. While there is extensive research on the contribution of migrant remittances to development in sending countries, there is much less research on refugee remittances. More understanding and data about refugee

remittances flows and their impact on host communities would help us understand their role in refugees’ livelihoods, and the contribution they make towards underpinning human security in host areas. Anecdotal evidence suggests that in some conflict areas, like the eastern Congo, remittances and parcels of household items from the diaspora are the only source of cash, educational materials or clothing for many people. In most Refugee Hosting Area (RHA) the infrastructure for refugee remittance transfer is in place both in camps and in urban areas. In the Kenyan refugee camps\textsuperscript{26}, for example, Somali and Sudanese refugees have established unofficial banking and money transfer systems, using satellite dishes or radio call transmitters connected to telephones. Western Union is used in addition to unofficial banking and transfer systems and cash remittances are often kept in local banks until they can be used to buy passage for onward journeys, either to more economically favorable host countries or areas in the region, or to facilitate return to countries of origin.

\textit{International assistance}

The arrival of humanitarian assistance following a refugee influx creates a new set of livelihood resources in the RHA. These resources appear in two forms: the first is formal livelihood support programmes, like income generating activities, which are directly implemented by aid agencies in camps and official settlements and sometimes in the host community itself. The second way in which livelihoods are supported by humanitarian assistance is through indirect economic stimuli to the RHA economy. Relief agencies create new economic inputs and demands that spread beyond the camps, creating livelihood opportunities for both locals and refugees. New demands include the need for services, like trucking, delivery, construction, administration or translation. New inputs take the form of relief commodities that are traded throughout the RHA often creating entire new regional economies. For example, the trading of food aid and merchandise from refugee camps within RHAs and across borders has evolved into a complex and multifaceted system, supporting the livelihoods of different social groups including unaccompanied youths. It is common for some part of the UNHCR/WFP food package to be bartered in exchange for missing or desired items of food available locally in the host community.

\textsuperscript{26} Kakuma Camps, Kenya.
While it is increasingly recognised that humanitarian assistance should be used, as much as possible, to support livelihoods as a part of life-saving strategies, livelihood support is not without challenges. This is especially so in conflict-affected areas, where the resources become targeted by warlords and other forms of organized crime, or when competition for them leads to violence and further conflict.

6. Negative coping strategies

Environmental depletion
Finding themselves in a situation where they have no access to land, generally refugees may resort to unsustainable or illegal agricultural practices in order to meet their food needs. Such habits include non-selective tree-felling and indiscriminate land clearance, as well as shifting cultivation without a sustainable rotation strategy.

A fundamental contradiction arises in promoting a sustainable approach to agriculture when refugees lacking formal ownership rights are required to live off the land in a sustainable way. They will tend to take a short–term perspective to meeting their food security needs, and not consider the longer-term implications of their practices, even if with long-time usage most of the farm plots are now recording low and declining productivity.

As regards the relation between refugees and the environment, it is well acknowledged that their impact on the host environment can be severe, as the primary concern of the refugees is safety and welfare and not the protection of the environment and natural resources. In a matter of weeks ten of thousands of people are grouped in crowded refugee camps situated often in barren and treeless areas, where firewood is scarce and expensive.

As a result, among the many issues characterizing refugee camps the most important is fuel shortages that can affect not only refugee food security, but also their physical security, especially when they are women. The women of Mtabilia camp (Tanzania), for example, must travel miles to collect firewood and that makes them vulnerable to rape and robbery by gangs of bandits who frequent the region.

An interesting programme that have successfully addressed the lack of energy in refugee camps, is that of solar cooking, whose main goal was balancing the cooking needs of

refugees with the fuel shortages. Put simply, the sun's energy is captured by devices which maximum its heat for transfer to a black cooking vessel. Devices are of many and varied types, from low cost folded cardboard cookers (resembling small sized tanning booths), to wood or plastic boxes with glass covers and reflectors to capture sunlight. This project was implemented by Solar Cooker International (SCI) in many refugee camps such as Kakuma (Kenya) and Aisha camps (Ethiopia).

In November 2004 SCI published the final evaluation report on the Solar Cooking Project (SCP) implemented in Kakuma refugee camps. The evaluation took place in 2003, eight years after the project started. Solar cookers make sense in this remote camp where fuel gathering outside the camp is forbidden, and firewood rations are usually only about one-third of what is needed to cook the food rations. The study reported that the only "money" refugees had was a portion of their sparse food rations to barter for essential fuel to cook the rest. Evaluators documented that families solar cooking could save up to 510 Kenyan shillings (nearly $7) per month, or over 50% of their monthly fuel expenditure. Whereas the use of solar cooking is not regarded as the panacea to the energy problem in the refugee camps, the project has been particularly valuable also under an environmental perspective, since the saving of fuel translates into a less degree of pollution and deforestation.

**Manipulation of international aid**

The manipulation of international aid becomes the only solution when there are few options in sight. The sale of food rations is a coping strategy that many refugees admitted to using at one point or another. When asked to explain why one would sell their food items in the local markets, the explanations all pointed to the need for cash to purchase non-food items that had not been extended in the assistance package. These often included personal hygiene materials, or food of personal taste and, sometimes, cigarettes and alcohol.

**Prostitution**

In some camps, sections of the community complain about increased levels of prostitution. One of the most serious and worrying accusations is that the main customers for refugee prostitutes, given the lack of available cash within the camps, are staff of
NGOs and other organizations. Those who were willing to talk about this sensitive topic included women and youths of both genders, the consensus was that selling sexual favours, whether formally for cash or on the basis of a kind of patronage, is a function of poverty and an absence of alternative livelihood strategies.

It is rarely asserted that young women involved in such activities rely on them for their basic needs such as food and shelter, but rather that they engage in them in order to be able to gain access to the additional material benefits which they understand to be what makes life worth living. Gifts of food or clothing may be made, but the woman is unlikely to receive any support in the event that she becomes pregnant. This kind of relationship is to be distinguished from what is described as ‘refugee marriage’ when a more formal relationship is entered into, even if this is not expected to outlast the refugee situation.

7. Food aid and food security

Although refugees are frequently depicted as people totally dependent on international aid, they continue to try to pursue their livelihoods. However, as noted during the paragraphs dedicated to coping strategies, many of the strategies refugees employ to meet their current food needs undermine their wealth and food security.

The refugees living in camps often eat fewer and less nutritious meals in order to make what they have last longer without depleting their assets. In such circumstances, a food aid response may be required to sustain life, restore refugee self-reliance and reduce the need for them to adopt potentially damaging coping strategies. Whenever analysis determine that food aid is an appropriate response, this should be undertaken in a manner that meets the short-term needs of refugees but also, as far as possible, contributes to restoring their long-term food security.

Preserving self-sufficiency among the poor is not a simple task, but the situation is much more complicated within a refugee camp. The focus of the assessment of food security in a camp should reflect how the refugees acquired food before the displacement and how such displacement has effected this.

According to a definition of food security developed by the UN Special Rapporteur28

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“The right to food is the right to have regular, permanent and unobstructed access, either directly or by means of financial purchases, to quantitatively and qualitatively adequate and sufficient food corresponding to the cultural traditions of the people to which the consumer belongs, and which ensures a physical and mental, individual and collective, fulfilling and dignified life free from anxiety.”

If the definition above underlines the importance of three important criteria like access, availability and sufficiency of food, the food security of refugees living in camps is characterised by some particular features. In particular, the problems affecting many camps concern above all the access to food and the policies implemented by host countries dealing with mass refugee influxes.

Food security varies according to refugees’ livelihoods, their status and above all their location. Within a refugee camp food access refers to the ability of individuals and households to secure food aid from the international agencies in order to meet their short-term needs, but it also encompasses the purchase of type of foods other than those provided in the basket. As a result, the purchasing power play a crucial role in analysing the refugee access to food, especially where is frequently acknowledged that refugees are often prevented from engaging themselves in income-generating activities. Of course the main source of food remains the ration distributed by the international agencies since, as underlined above, it is often impossible for camp residents to own livestock or cultivate outside the camps.

For “poor” and “poorest” households, the major source of income is the sale of the ration. According to a study undertaken by The Save the Children Fund (UK) on Kakuma Camps (Kenya), poor household sell 15-50% of their cereal ration at every distribution. A typical “poor” Sudanese household will sell and exchange 20-30% of the ration to buy other foods and cooking fuel.

Although the poor spend most of their income in food items, they lose calories when they exchange the cereals for tiny quantities of meat, vegetables, milk and sugar. Therefore, the household runs short of food before the next distribution and tries to borrow food or send the children to eat with a neighbour. During these few days, family

members may not be able to obtain the recommended 2100 Kcal/day, posing a risk to their short-term food security. Hence, it can be said that the poor’s ability to meet their food needs depends on the will and capacity of the wealthier household to assist them. As a result, the connections a camp dweller has to rich residing in and outside the camp play a leading role in securing or preventing his basic foods and other needs, since those with the appropriate connection are able to start businesses, travel outside the camps and may find it easier to secure land to cultivate.

In a recent report undertaken on behalf of UNHCR and WFP, the researchers have frequently underlined the crucial role of social capital, conceptualised as an “intermediate” capital in that not is itself a commodity or service, but a network through which services and commodity might flow.

8. The framework of food aid distribution

As stressed above, most refugees are largely dependent upon food aid for survival, at least in the short-term. The aim is to ensure that food is available and accessible to the whole population through the distribution of an adequate food ration. Such intervention is required whatever the level of malnutrition. The assessment of refugee food needs is usually the responsibility of UNHCR and WFP, albeit local governments should be involved, and NGOs occasionally participate. Three specific aspects must be assessed in order to organize the food supply:

1) population figures
2) quantity of the general food rations
3) quality of the general food rations.

As regards the population figures, the number of beneficiaries is indispensable in order to plan food needs, while age and sex composition of the population should be crucial in investigating potential issues related to gender. These aspects are closely linked to the registration process that determines who is entitled to food aid.

UNHCR\textsuperscript{31} is mandated to assist refugees, and the humanitarian aid that it offers is targeted at them. In order to know that the aid is going to the right people, it is necessary to know who they are. The basic registration of refugees provides the required information on the location of aid recipients and their demographic profile; but besides any protection requirements, the driving force behind registration is very often a concern with the management of aid resources.

A distribution system should ensure that everybody receives the same ration, in order to meet principles of equity. The family represents the natural unit targeted for distribution and one of the most equitable systems is to distribute to heads of households (men or women), based on registration. This can also be done effectively through groups of families or other community structures.

The system of distribution through community leaders is quicker because there is no need for registration and gives more responsibility to the refugee communities, but it frequently results in distribution inequities and food diversion. It is currently suggested that women should be the distributors of food because they are fairer in their allocations and more vulnerable to distribution inequities. In order to represent the refugees in discussions concerning the distribution system, a distribution committee, in which women should be well represented, is usually set up.

However, food distributions have often met problems in trying to cover the basic needs of the refugees living in camps.

There are several factors which hamper the provision of adequate rations. Such problems include gaps in food delivery due to lack of funds from donors, supplies based on donor country surpluses that can lead to insufficient quantities of essential items like oil and legumes, food losses which may occur at different points in the system during transport, warehousing or distributions. Furthermore, the storage of large quantities of food frequently leads to severe security problems regarding an inadequate nutrient content of the ration, particularly over the longer term. For instance, the type of food aid supplied by donors and the logistical problems of distribution make it difficult to provide the food regularly and in sufficient quantities.

The quantity of food rations depends on the different standards adopted by relief agencies in order to meet minimum nutritional needs. Several humanitarian agencies recommend a minimum average ration of 2100 Kcal/person/per day, although there are circumstances that require an increase in the general ration. Such situations include general malnutrition or epidemics, low temperatures, inadequate shelter or lack of blankets and increased activity level (e.g. farming).

The classic food basket should contain six basic ingredients: a cereal, a pulse, oil/fat, and, in principle, a fortified cereal blend, sugar and salt according to a joint UNHCR and WFP decision; it may sometimes include fish or meat. According to the priorities of the 2003, UNHCR and WFP have addressed the issue whether the food basket provided to refugees is adequate and if not, what changes need to be made. The size of the food basket is based on the assumption that refugees had access to land for farming or wage-earning opportunities with which supplement the rations distributed. Changes in policy of the host governments can severely restrict such opportunities, as occurred in Tanzania, where newly arriving refugees appear not to have such possibilities at all.

A particularly debated issue in designing a framework of the food aid distribution is that of balancing the need of the refugee living in camps and those of the host community. Such problem arises especially when the refugees arrive in very remote areas of great poverty where some local hosts may be poorer than refugees, and many live at a very low level of subsistence.

As refugees are provided with aid resources from food to free health care, their standard of living can exceed that of many of their hosts and such circumstances can cause resentment. UNHCR suggests that tension should be avoided by ensuring that there is sufficient aid available, so there is not negative impact on local resources and infrastructure improvement are designed to benefit also the local community.

9. Malnutrition patterns among the refugees

The risk of vitamin and mineral deficiencies is now known to be very high in refugee camps. In countries where retail food chains are disrupted and populations are displaced

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32 The minimum ration of 2100 Kcal/person/day should contain at least 10% protein energy and 10% fat energy.
33 Priorities of the 2003 – WFP/UNHCR Joint Assessment Mission.
from areas of production, fresh foods become unavailable. In most emergencies, the micronutrient content of the diet is restricted even more than is the caloric intake. More often than not, refugee populations already had deficient diets prior to the onset of crisis; the intervention of relief agencies may merely ‘discover’ deficiencies that had long existed without outside notice. Progress in applying food aid to prevent protein-energy malnutrition in refugee camps has not translated to equal success in reducing micronutrient deficiency; even when relief foods are adequate in total calorie and protein composition, they tend to be limited in micronutrient content.

The way aid is provided reinforces the problem of poor dietary diversity. In marked contrast to macronutrient nutrition, which improve over time as emergency-affected populations receive relief aid, micronutrient problems frequently appear to remain prevalent, or even worsen as relief is provided. In some cases, dependence on bulk relief foods may even cripple tendencies for populations to diversify their diets by reducing the incentive or rationale for establishing local cultivation and household gardens. This effect becomes more important over time, as refugees stay in camps for many years, as in Pakistan, Thailand and Malawi. Refugees and emergency-affected populations are also very prone to inadequate sanitation and thereby suffer intestinal infections that lead to malabsorption. In the 1980s, the importance of identifying and reporting nutritional deficiency diseases in camps was incorporated into systems of surveillance. However, evidence of micronutrient deficiency diseases do not regularly get put into clinical records, and there is little ability to conduct active case-finding amid the chaos of relief operations.

As a result, most overt deficiency diseases that occur in emergencies are not reported or documented. Two of the most well-known deficiencies, vitamin A deficiency and iron-deficiency anemia, are exceptions. Sometimes, sample surveys are conducted for vitamin A deficiency prevalence and iron-deficiency anemia is so widely reported in inpatient and outpatient clinic records that a good picture of the scope of these deficiencies is probably captured. Based on research from the last fifteen years, most nutritionists now recognize the severe and pervasive effects of the high numbers of moderate cases of deficiency diseases that do not manifest clinical signs. Many micronutrient deficiencies also go unaddressed, because they occur in emergencies that do not receive adequate international intervention.
10. Assessing food security: the food economy analysis applied to refugee camps

The food economy approach first appeared in 1994, within Save the Children (UK) (SC UK). It arose out of two decades of experience with food security assessment in the Sahel (Ethiopia). Food economy analysis is an analytical framework to help decision-makers understand the effects of different “shocks” on household livelihood options. It takes as a starting point a standard definition of food security and uses its implication to help frame the requirements of enquiry.

In case of refugee camps, food security is ensured when all refugees have access to sufficient food at all times. Access to food is the guiding principle, encompassing both production and market options: refugees can obtain food through producing it themselves or through some kind of exchange, or through non-reciprocal transfers, like gifts or international assistance. However, in this type of analysis an other crucial component is measuring “sufficiency” against a set standard; such measurement implies a threshold showing a minimum calorie requirement.

Two basic steps are involved in conducting a food security analysis in a refugee camp:

1) defining the socio-economic differentiation among the refugees through interviews with the camp dwellers themselves

2) undertaking socio-economic interviews to establish food and cash income options.

The socio-economic differentiation is done by classifying together camp dwellers with a similar ability to obtain access to food and cash. This tends to be virtually synonymous with a camp wealth classification and hence this stage is called also a “wealth breakdown”. During these interviews, villagers explain the reasons and attributes of local differences in wealth, and estimate the proportion of the camp that falls into each wealth group.

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37 However the purpose of the assessment may demand differentiation according to other criteria, such as length of stay in the camp or ethnicity. In such case the categories are more aptly described by the term “access group” rather than “wealth groups”.

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The number of groups is limited only by relevant differences in access and often more than four groups are identified, including at times specific gender groups such as the poorest female-headed households who are distinguished as labour-poor, land-poor and capital-poor. The production and exchange characteristics for households in each group are established, such as the typical area of land cultivated (where allowed by the host government), the number of children educated and the number of livestock owned. This information is gathered through focus-group interviews with each economic group.

The purpose is to quantify households’ options and strategies for obtaining access to food and income. It is at this stage that the concept of the threshold is used. The relative importance of each food source is calculated by converting the source into calorific equivalents and expressing these as a proportion of the minimum calorific needs of the household. The ability of households to buy the food they need to make up a production deficit, both in relatively stable and in abnormal times, is assessed by exploring the cash income available from different sources, and by cross-checking households’ total cash income against cash expenditure. Investigations into cash expenditure are important in two ways. Firstly, it is much easier to arrive at a reliable estimate of total cash income when one has an idea of cash expenditure to act as a starting point. Secondly, food economy analysis is commonly used to assess the ability of households to meet both their food and non-food needs, and therefore demands an estimate not only of households’ minimum food requirements, but also of their minimum non-food requirements. To assess minimum expenditure requirements, the field investigator, first, looks into normal cash expenditure on food, health care, education and other essential items. He or she then assesses how households prioritise expenditure in times of food security stress.

Judgement by the field teams, after debate with refugees and with each other in analysis sessions, leads to a deduction of the items that should be included in a non-food basket representing minimum non-food requirements. The cumulative cost of these items becomes the cost of a basic food basket typical of the zone in question. Minimum non-food expenditure is then converted into food or calorie equivalents to make it possible to compare its relative value to total food income and remaining cash income.

Another important part of these interviews is finding out from people what options they can, and have previously, reverted to in times of stress; these might include changing...
expenditure patterns, finding new income sources or drawing down on existing stocks and surpluses.

**Conclusions**

A 1981 UNHCR Executive Committee Conclusion defines the minimum standards determining the entitlement to a required treatment that asylum seekers and refugees should enjoy, pending arrangements for a durable solution. Such standards include, *inter alia*, freedom of movement, treatment in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the need to receive all necessary assistance. However, the nature of refugee status itself precludes camps residents from enjoying such rights. In a refugee camp, questions of development, capabilities and livelihood security are often put on hold, since the situation is supposed to be temporary.

As a result, humanitarian agencies expend much of their energy on ensuring international protection through the preservation of *non-refoulement* principle, and the establishment of camps endowed with adequate assistance. If in a refugee emergency situation minimum standards of treatment are synonymous with essential needs, over time such needs should be defined dynamically as grounded in minimum standards, but aspiring to meet other criteria, such as those of self-reliance and self-sufficiency.

In refugee camps it is possible to draw, at least theoretically, a distinction between coping strategies as short-term responses to unusual food stresses, and adaptation strategies as coping tactics which have become permanently incorporated into the normal cycle of activities. In protracted refugee situations most households living in camps tend to favour a mixed strategy, pursuing several activities (legal and not), which offer variable returns in efforts to reduce their vulnerability.

Although the entire community of camp dwellers might face equal exposure to vulnerability, resilience is distributed differently across households, depending on relative wealth (savings and assets) and access to alternative income source, including support from extended family or social networks. Many refugees speak of the hardship and lack of opportunities since arriving in the camps; such difficulties are due to the lack of those economic rights to which a refugee should be entitled according to the refugee international law.
Livelihood Strategies & Food Security in Refugee Camps

If the development literature is used to describe vulnerability as the capacities of people to resist and recover from the impact of a disaster, in refugee camps the vulnerability is caused and enhanced by the lack of entitlements that prevent refugees from pursuing sustainable livelihood strategies. Livelihood and food security are deeply influenced by the scarce access to income and food sources other than those provided in the framework of humanitarian aid. Over the last decade many efforts have been made in order to foster refugee self-reliance through income generating programmes. However, such activities have frequently failed because of lack of technical assistance from UNHCR or from its partners.

As regards food security, such topic is often reduced to a problem of production, but it is recognized that a range of variables other than agricultural productivity and aggregate food supply can undermine refugee entitlement to food. There is an asymmetry in the incidence of food insecurity among different refugee groups, with entitlements arising not only because of overall food shortages, but because camp dwellers are unable to trade their labour power or skills. Casting the issue in terms of essential needs, one necessitates to account for the fact that the refugees have very few legal choices of obtaining food. They are not allowed out of the camps, and within it, animal husbandry is forbidden and agriculture is often unfeasible and where it is allowed, it can vary in output, making refugees more vulnerable and in need of food assistance. As a result, most camps are totally dependent upon food aid distribution.

The fact that many refugees consider it necessary to sell part of their own ration, indicates that food basket is not well calibrated. Food aid distribution is a short-term affair. Perhaps other distribution systems might be considered, such as ration shops where refugees could purchase food with their ration cards, and have the possibility to select those items they require, according to their habits and preferences. In terms of complementary food, there may be possibilities of purchasing items from the local population, contributing to improve the relations between the refugees and the hosts.

It is often repeated that refugees diminish the welfare of the receiving region by imposing economic and environmental burdens that outweigh any benefits derived from the refugees presence. Host governments often complain that refugees outside the camps compete with locals for scarce resources such as land, jobs and environmental resources.
Livelihood Strategies & Food Security in Refugee Camps

In order to dissipate all these fears and anxiety, it can be argued that the welfare of host countries, particularly the host community is increased by the presence of refugees, whether they are in camps or “self settled”.

Refugees bring material wealth from their home countries, ranging from gold to trucks and computers. New markets spring up around refugee camps and a large amount of goods, including illicit ones, can be found that were unattainable in the region before. This is a demonstration of how access to markets can directly influence both refugee self-reliance and the welfare of host communities. In this regard, refugee policies implemented by host countries play a crucial role in promoting or preventing livelihood and food security within camps. However, the experience acknowledges that the needs and potentials of refugees are rarely included in national development plans to eradicate poverty. A recent study38 carried out by the UNHCR has analysed twenty Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) for refugee hosting countries and it has demonstrated that none of them perceives refugees to be agents of development, and only two (Armenia and Serbia-Montenegro) out of twenty include refugees in their strategies to fight poverty.

There are probably a number of reasons for this. First of all, since refugees are not part of the government’s political constituency, there is a lack of political will to incorporate them in development strategies. There is the expectation that the hosting of refugees is temporary, and that they will benefit from humanitarian funds through UNHCR and other humanitarian actors. If on the one hand hosting governments are diffident to change their policy because concerned that humanitarian assistance will not be replaced by development funds, for refugees the lack of rights, coupled with the temporary nature of refugee status, mitigate against long-term investments, and increase their vulnerability.

Livelihoods and food security among the refugees are closely interrelated and they may be positively influenced by the policies developed by the host country. Allowing refugees greater mobility, or subsidizing transport so that they can afford to visit markets, might be important steps towards self-sufficiency among the camp dwellers. However, although such provisions represent important elements to break the isolation of many camps, they must be accompanied by policies of entitlements through which refugees are enabled to earn their living without help.

REFERENCES


Livelihood Strategies & Food Security in Refugee Camps


