

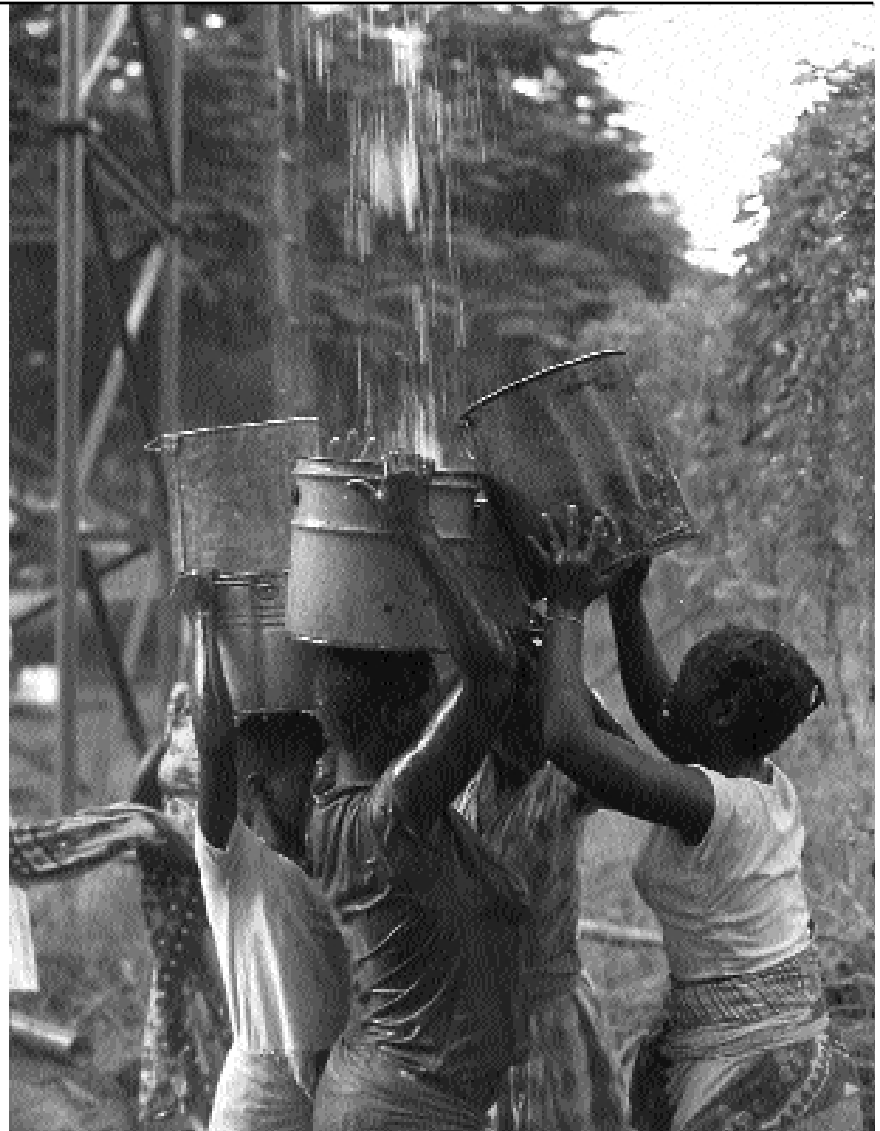
# Camps: literature review

by Barbara Harrell-Bond

Refugee policy in the South has been largely driven by the demands of donors and humanitarian organisations (Karadawi 1984).

It requires rethinking, both in terms of the needs of refugees and their hosts (RSP 1991). Assistance policies have encouraged the confinement of large numbers of refugees in settlements or camps, rendering them dependent on relief (Kibreab 1989, 1991; Voutira and Harrell-Bond 1995; Hyndman 1997). Camps deprive refugees of access to networks of social and economic support and there is evidence that over the long term even those camps deemed self-sufficient become destitute (Clark and Stein 1985). Focusing assistance on refugees in camps ignores the needs of the majority of refugees who are self-settled (Chambers 1979; Hansen 1979, 1981, 1982, 1982a). Attracting money not only requires counting refugees for the purposes of assessing need but involves controlling their movement and representing them as helpless and dependent (Harrell-Bond *et al* 1992). Despite this being an inordinately expensive way of assisting refugees and, in practice, contravening most of their rights (African Rights 1997), host governments have acquiesced in order to become eligible for international aid. The popular media image of the refugee as a 'problem', rather than as 'persons with problems', has obscured the reality that refugees are ready to put their energies into productive work which could also benefit their hosts (Wilson 1992; Harrell-Bond 1986; Bulcha 1988; Kuhlman 1990).

Confinement to settlements/camps has been demonstrated to have a number of adverse effects on both refugees and hosts (Chambers 1985; Nieburg *et al* 1992). Establishing parallel services undermines local institutions by attracting the best staff to earn the higher salaries paid by humanitarian organisations (Goyen *et al* 1996). Targeting relief to camps, surrounded by people often as poor or poorer than refugees, is wasteful and generates hostility from local communities (Harrell-Bond 1986, Chap 4). Life in camps adversely affects the mental health of already traumatised people and inhabitants frequently



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exhibit despair and helplessness at their long-term prospects and the combination of confinement and dependency encouraging them to abandon social responsibilities (Clark 1985). Congregating refugees strains local resources, including the environment, more than does a dispersed population (Black 1994); it also represents a health risk by increasing exposure to disease (Toole and Bhatia 1992). There is a clear link between the size of camps and mortality rates (van Damme 1995). Camps provide ideal breeding grounds for politicisation and for violence and terrorism (Harrell-Bond 1994).

There is a common fear that those who are able to achieve economic stability in

the host country will never return but repatriation has proven to be destabilising to the country of origin (Harrell-Bond 1994). Nevertheless, the long-term goal of most governments (host and donor) is that refugees will repatriate, and common sense and experience suggest that people impoverished by an economy based on relief will be unable to return without enormous investment in their economic rehabilitation, while those able to acquire the resources in exile are likely to return voluntarily when conditions are conducive (Sepulveda 1994). Where governments have been able to provide sufficient land to sustain a population and where they have not imposed restrictions on movement or their employment within the

wider economy, refugees have proven to be an economic asset (Kuhlman 1989; Mollett 1991; Harrell-Bond 1996).

In cases where host governments have maintained control of refugee policy, using international aid to expand their economies as a whole, it has benefited both refugees and local populations (Zetter 1992). In the process, they have avoided the inevitable tensions which result from earmarking aid for certain beneficiaries (Harrell-Bond 1986, Chap 4; Chambers 1985).

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