have learnt to cut and polish semi-precious stones; some have set up their own businesses, while others have found private employment

- female income-generation projects making coir ropes and brushes
- enabling vulnerable widows and older people to supplement their income by raising poultry
- raising environmental awareness by improving camp sanitation facilities, encouraging energy efficiency and promotion of biogas
- supporting 176 women self-help groups (each of between 15 and 18 members) who receive credit to enable food manufacture and vending microenterprises
- credit provision to young male refugees to establish grocery, bakery, fish and vegetable marketing and cycle repair business
- loans to enable trained masons, carpenters and painters to purchase tools; 2,000 refugees now work in the construction industry

**Lessons learned**

OFERR has provided an empowerment model for self-help refugee organisations elsewhere. They have demonstrated that a refugee-run organisation can:

- base programmes on accurate knowledge of refugee needs
- put resources to optimum use for the benefit of maximum number of refugees
- ensure that the needs of vulnerable community members are not ignored
- integrate health, nutrition, income-generation, microcredit and skills training programmes
- devise ingenious methods to mobilise resources from expatriates both in the countries of resettlement and of origin
- provide practical training and technical assistance to build sustainable livelihoods
- establish credibility with donors and attract new funding sources

- create a pool of skilled refugees ready to provide long-term economic benefits and assist post-conflict reconstruction.

OFERR’s empowerment programmes have not only helped the refugees to be gainfully occupied but also overcome the psychological trauma resulting from prolonged residence in camps and years of uncertainty regarding prospects for return to Sri Lanka. The dependency syndrome often accompanying prolonged stay in camps has been avoided.

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The website of the Organization for Eelam Refugees Rehabilitation (OFERR) is www.oferr.org

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**Livelihood opportunities for Sudanese refugees**

Some of the most disadvantaged refugees in Egypt are former Sudanese students who remained in Egypt when the democratically-elected Sudanese government was overthrown in 1989. A small number of them managed to settle in the West but the majority remained in Egypt as refugees; legal restrictions, however, prevent them from working officially.

Many work illegally in jobs that do not match their qualifications. Some stay at home, dependent on their spouses. Women have assumed greater responsibility for their families often because the men are unwilling to do the lower status jobs that are available. Some former students receive remittances from relatives and friends in the West, a flow of resources key to the survival strategies of many refugees in Egypt.

Skills for Southern Sudan is an NGO set up in 1995 by Windle Trust International to support educated Sudanese refugees in Britain and East Africa in developing relevant skills for the job marketplace and helping them find employment.

In 1997 Skills for Southern Sudan set up an office in Kenya to facilitate Sudanese professionals’ return to Africa, arranging job-seeking workshops and assisting with recruitment. In February 1999 they opened an office in Cairo to provide information and support to those Sudanese refugees willing to take up training and employment opportunities in East Africa and southern Sudan. The Cairo office is now closed.

Skills for Southern Sudan has run training courses (in Cairo, southern Sudan and Nairobi) in subjects such as report-writing, CV preparation, interview techniques, good governance, language skills and women’s empowerment. A number of Sudanese refugees from Cairo have returned to southern Sudan; most have mainly found work with humanitarian organisations but some are working with the civil administration of the SPLA, which sorely lacks skilled personnel. When the peace accords are finally signed, returnees will be able to contribute to their country’s reconstruction and attainment of a durable peace.

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