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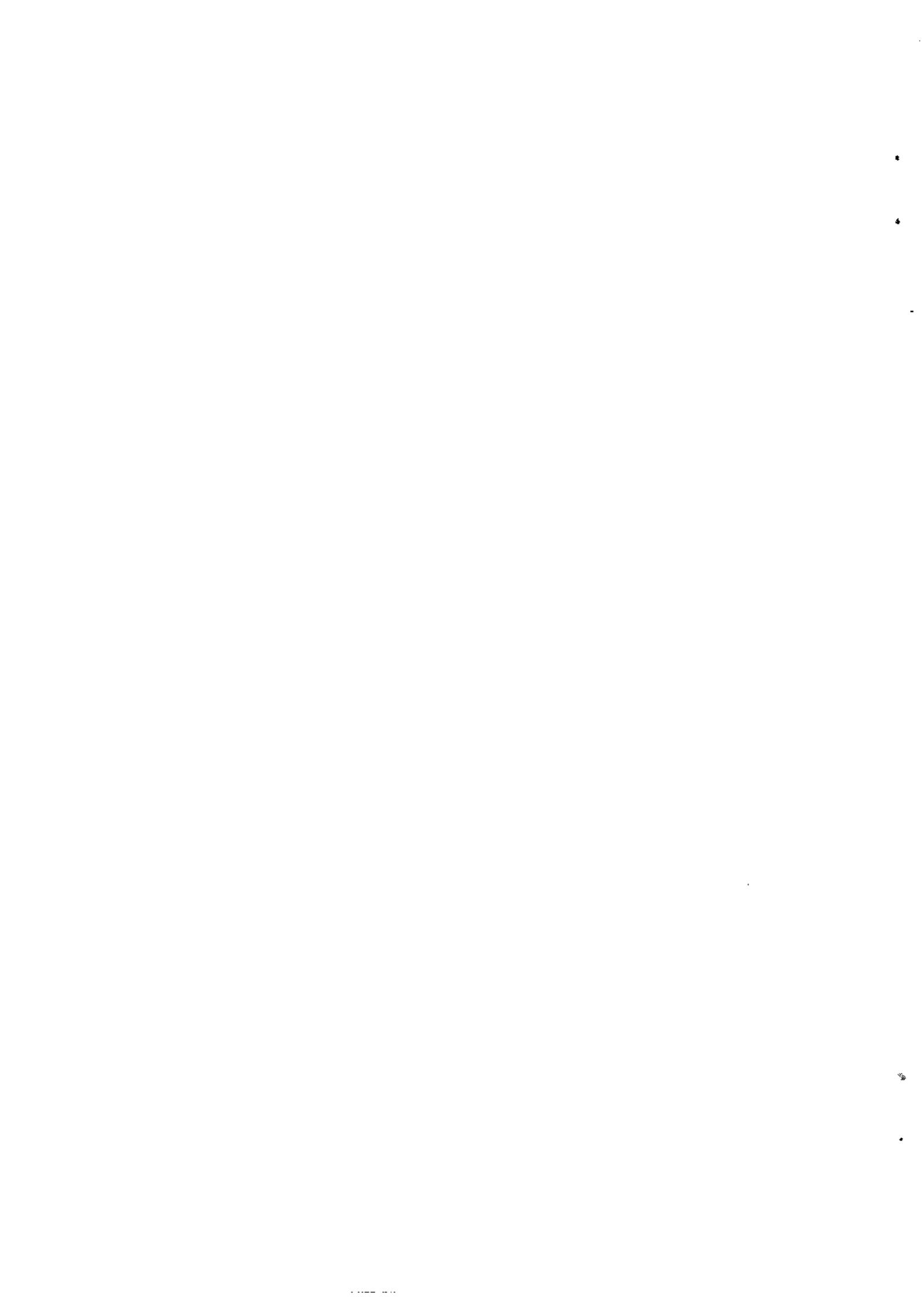
### **ORGANIZED VERSUS SPONTANEOUS SETTLEMENT OF REFUGEES IN AFRICA**

A contribution to the discussion from an economic point of view.

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## ORGANIZED VERSUS SPONTANEOUS SETTLEMENT OF REFUGEES IN AFRICA

*A contribution to the discussion from an economic point of view*

Tom Kuhlman

In the quest for what are called durable solutions to Africa's refugee problems, most attention is focused on refugee integration in the country of first asylum. As is well known, three such solutions are recognized by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR): voluntary repatriation, integration in the country of first asylum, and resettlement in a third country. The first is the preferred option, and millions of African refugees have repatriated voluntarily during the past two decades (Rogge & Akol, 1989). However, this is an option which depends entirely on improvement of the situation in the refugees' country of origin; it is thus largely outside the perspective of those observers and policymakers who are concerned with assisting refugees in the country of asylum. Attempts to stimulate it in the absence of such improvement are unlikely to meet with success - worse, they risk violating the principle of non-refoulement (Harrell-Bond, 1989).

Third-country resettlement is considered the least desirable option: it is expensive, and the social problems of integration are, if anything, even more intractable than in the country of first asylum (where the cultural setting is often at least somewhat familiar to the refugees). In the current international climate it is an option available only to a fortunate minority of better-educated refugees.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, by depriving the refugee community of precisely those elements that may constitute indigenous leadership and by fostering the hope of moving to a better place, the limited availability of this option may frustrate rather than enhance the success of local integration. Given the impotence of the international community in promoting the first alternative and its unwillingness as regards the third, integration in the country of first asylum becomes - if only by default - the most feasible option in all cases where a solution for the 'root cause' of flight is not immediately in sight.

Two questions may then be asked: what constitutes such integration, and how is it to be achieved or, more modestly, promoted? As for the latter question, there are basically two alternative policies: either the refugees are allowed to settle freely among the local populace, or special settlement schemes are devised for them by the host country government in cooperation with UNHCR (a combination of the two is, of course, also possible). These alternatives are usually referred to as spontaneous and organized settlement, respectively. The term 'spontaneous' is somewhat inadequate: there is little spontaneity in refugee movements which tend to be governed by necessity rather than free choice. Instead, I shall often use the terms 'self-settled refugees' and 'settlements', meaning organized settlements.

This article proposes a definition of integration, formulated with a view to its convenience for policies and programmes concerned with refugees. The focus is on economic integration, which is a crucial

aspect both for the refugees themselves and for the agencies spending funds on them. Next, the debate on the issue of organized vs. spontaneous settlement for refugees in Africa that has taken place in the past is reviewed, as well as the policies that have been its outcome. Armed with the concept of economic integration, an attempt is made to evaluate the relative merits of organized and spontaneous settlement on the basis of empirical evidence. Most of this evidence comes from the case of Eritrean refugees in the Eastern Sudan, among whom the author conducted research (Kok, 1989; Kuhlman, 1990); however, I have drawn also from literature on refugee integration elsewhere in Africa.

It must be stated at the outset that in assessing the influence of the type of settlement policy on economic integration, this article deals with only one aspect - albeit a crucial one - of those policies. It attempts to determine which type is the more conducive to economic integration. There are many reasons for adopting one policy or the other; while I shall comment on these reasons, it is not my purpose to prove wrong those policies that are actually followed by host country governments and by international agencies. My only concern is that those policies which are detrimental to economic integration are shown to be so, and that any argument in favour of such policies must be based on different grounds. Another point is that the article is concerned only with what have been termed the rehabilitation and the development phases of refugee assistance, not with the phase of emergency relief. Settlements are quite different from relief camps, and arguments concerning the one are not valid for the other.

#### What is economic integration?

Whereas integration is often hailed as the goal of refugee assistance, there has been little effort to define it with the precision necessary to ascertain whether it is being achieved. Of course, integration can be seen as a process rather than a goal, but even then it is necessary to state the direction in which that process is supposed to proceed. Thus, an UNHCR publication describes integration as "the process by which the refugee is assimilated into the social and economic life of a new national community" (UNHCR, undated: 5). This definition is clearly unsatisfactory: it is tautological in merely replacing the term to be defined by another word.

A useful definition should reflect the purpose of a policy. The purpose of refugee assistance can be summarized as making itself superfluous - achieving a situation where assistance can be withdrawn. Thus, integration might be defined as a state of affairs where the refugees have become independent of external assistance. However, for that case I prefer the term self-sufficiency. Refugees are self-sufficient when they manage to acquire an income (in cash or kind) such that they do not need to be given relief in the form of basic necessities such as food, clothing or shelter. To be exact, this is called family self-sufficiency. At that stage, aid for services such

as education, health and water supplies may still be necessary. A situation where the refugees are also able to finance community services themselves (whether communally or through taxation) is called community self-sufficiency.<sup>2</sup>

Self-sufficiency of either type can be a useful objective for organized settlements. The concept has no meaning, however, in the context of self-settled refugees who survive without aid anyway and are therefore self-sufficient by definition. As they often live in abject poverty, however, it would be quite improper to call them integrated. Therefore, integration should reflect a situation where the problems resulting from flight are solved.<sup>3</sup> Integration subsumes the concept of self-sufficiency without being identical with it.

These problems concern not only the refugees themselves, but also the population of the host country which bears the burden of their presence. Therefore, a definition of integration should include the effects of that burden. This element is reflected in Harrell-Bond's tentative definition: "a situation in which host and refugee communities are able to co-exist, sharing the same resources - both economic and social - with no greater mutual conflict than that which exists within the host community" (1986: 7). However, she immediately rejects this definition as too simple: access to resources may be unequal, one group may be exploited by another, and conflict within the host society may have increased due to the pressure of the refugees' presence (Ibid.). Yet her definition has at least the merit that it looks at integration as something that happens not only to refugees but also to the host society.

Bulcha (1988: 85) uses a definition formulated by W.S. Bernard in connection with migrants in general: "integration is achieved when migrants become a working part of their adopted society, take on many of its attitudes and behaviour patterns and participate freely in its activities, but at the same time retain a measure of their original cultural identity and ethnicity". Bulcha thinks that this definition describes reality in Africa better than concepts such as assimilation or absorption do, in view of the plural nature of most African societies. Assimilation means that the migrants give up their former group identity and adopt the culture of the host society, but in a multi-cultural society migrants are likely to maintain their identity just like everyone else does. In Bulcha's words, integration "implies a mutual 'live and let live' attitude based on tolerance of differences, solidarity and positive interaction. This is not to suggest a harmonious equilibrium or a static balance between the different groups. Conflict is naturally part of the relationship" (Ibid.: 86). This may well describe loosely what happens to refugees in Africa, but how are we to measure integration in this sense, to what can it be opposed? Bulcha opposes 'integration' to 'marginalization', the latter meaning "withdrawal of the minority group into certain occupations, separate areas of residence or an inferior status"; it also involves "a limited degree of tolerance and acceptance ... towards the minority ... [which] must learn to survive under extreme social stress." (Ibid.) However, the concept of marginality - as is clear from Bulcha's own account - is the opposite not of integration but of assimilation: he quotes sociologists such as Park, Stonequist and Merton who all refer to 'marginal man' as an individual who fails to become a member of the community into which he has

migrated.<sup>4</sup> Bulcha's own formulation of the concept of integration is vague and contradictory: there may be solidarity and positive interaction, but also disequilibrium and conflict. When is a refugee integrated and when marginalized? Bulcha seems to suggest that the former applies to refugees in Africa and the latter to migrants from Third-World countries in Europe (1988: 86), but this is too facile: in Europe migrants can be marginalized because they could also be assimilated, whereas in plural societies there is nothing they could assimilate to - there is no common culture, nor any common standard of behaviour or wellbeing to which they could adhere or from which they could be said to deviate. Surely, many refugees in Africa also 'withdraw into certain occupations', suffer from 'an inferior status' as well as from 'extreme social stress'.

Because of this vagueness, Bulcha's definition is incapable of being operationalized; nor does it include the element of the refugees' impact on the host society - a reflection of the fact that refugee studies and refugee policies tend to be concerned with refugees only (cf. Chambers, 1986). On the other hand, the distinction between assimilation and integration is a useful one, especially in an African context. Obviously, a practical definition of integration in a plural society<sup>5</sup> must recognize the existence of a social stratification correlated with ethnicity. This means, for instance, that income differences between refugees and nationals do not automatically indicate a lack of integration: they may reflect existing differences between ethnic groups within the host society. Similarly, social distance or antagonism between refugees and nationals may not be higher than between different groups of nationals.

Instead I propose the following criteria: if refugees are able to participate in the host economy in ways commensurate with their skills and compatible with their cultural values; if they attain a standard of living which satisfies culturally determined minimum requirements;<sup>6</sup> if the socio-cultural change they undergo permits them to maintain an identity of their own and to adjust psychologically to their new situation; if standards of living and economic opportunities for members of the host society have not deteriorated due to the influx of refugees; if friction between host population and refugees is not worse than among the host population itself; and if the refugees do not encounter more discrimination than exists between groups previously settled within the host society: then refugees are truly integrated. A durable solution to the problems arising from flight can be said to have been achieved. This may seem a paradisiacal status seldom if ever attained in practice. What matters, however, is that it should give us a yardstick for measuring progress and for comparing the effects of alternative policies.

Integration itself is then defined as the process of change caused by the settlement of migrants in a plural society, if that process is evaluated in terms of the above criteria. It is obviously a process with many dimensions, each of which is the proper field of a particular science. We shall be concerned here with one dimension only: the economic, loosely defined as those aspects of social life having to do with attaining material welfare through the optimal allocation of resources that are scarce and alternatively applicable.<sup>7</sup> Stated more simply, we are concerned with how incomes are acquired, how high they are, and what standard of living they provide. Standard of living is

taken here as meaning not only income (in cash or kind) from economic activities, but also access to amenities such as housing, public utilities, health services, and education.

The question with which this article is concerned can now be restated as follows: what are the differences between organized and spontaneous settlement in terms of (1) the participation of refugees in economic activities (both proportionally and in relation to their skills); (2) the incomes acquired; (3) their access to amenities; (4) the effects on the host population in terms of employment, incomes and access to amenities? In other words: which of the two settlement forms stands the best chance of providing the refugees with satisfactory employment and a minimally acceptable standard of living, and which has the lowest negative effects on the host population?

In attempting to answer these questions, attention has to be paid to three issues: (1) the position of different socio-economic groups within both refugees and host population, rather than considering only the aggregate; (2) the distinction between short-term and long-term effects; and (3) the conditions that govern the effects of each settlement form: some effects depend not on the settlement form as such, but on changeable conditions in a particular case.

#### Organized vs. spontaneous settlement: the debate

Whenever African governments have recognized the existence of a refugee problem they have favoured organized settlement,<sup>8</sup> and in this they have mostly been supported by UNHCR. There are several sound reasons for such a policy,<sup>9</sup> especially when seen from the institutional interests of the state. In the first place, refugees always pose a security hazard to the state which gives them asylum, as its territory could be used as a staging-post for subversive action against the refugees' country of origin by militant elements among the refugees.<sup>10</sup> In order to avoid such a predicament the OAU Convention of 1969 prescribes that refugees are settled at a reasonable distance from the border (Nobel, 1982: 15). Putting the refugees into settlements is the easiest way to achieve this and to keep them under control.

A second reason for preferring organized settlement is that it is much easier to obtain foreign aid when the refugees are concentrated in a few locations where they are clearly visible than when they are dispersed among the local population. Spontaneously settled refugees are difficult to identify; their needs are not easily assessed; and the extent of the burden they impose on the host country is open to question. Refugees in camps, by contrast, pose a demonstrable and quantifiable burden, and therewith present a clear case for aid before the international community.

Aid organizations also have good reasons to support organized settlement. Their aim is to provide aid, and in order to get the necessary funds they must be able to show the need for them to their

constituents. As is the case for the host country, settlements make it easy to demonstrate and quantify this need. With self-settled refugees it would be very difficult to distinguish between aid provided for them and aid provided to the local population. These two are target groups for different aid organizations, and confusing them would raise all sorts of thorny issues regarding the competence of agencies and earmarking of funds.

Given the institutional context in which governments and aid organizations operate (see on this, for instance, Kent, 1987), these motivations are valid and realistic. They do not necessarily look good to public opinion, however, and therefore they are often justified by invoking other arguments. The most important of these are:

- (1) Settlements would provide better economic conditions for refugees.
- (2) By settling refugees separately from the local population, preferably in undeveloped areas and with external financing, the burden on the host country's economy would be minimized.

These arguments, it will be recognized, deal with the question of economic integration as defined above, and it is with these that I shall take issue in this article. Other, more doubtful, arguments are sometimes advanced:

- (3) There can be many reasons why governments wish to keep refugees separate from nationals (Holborn, 1975, Vol. I: 306-307): sometimes the refugees reinforce the numbers of a particular group in the host country, upsetting a precarious balance (cf. Karadawi, 1983: 540).
- (4) In some host countries there is fear that a large number of self-settled refugees could lead to an increased crime rate. Such fears are rarely expressed in international fora, but they are frequently stated privately (and in domestic political debate publicly as well). Regardless of its validity, this motivation must be recognized in examining the preference for organized settlement.
- (5) Settlements would permit the refugees to live in their own communities under their own leaders.

Rogge (1981: 200) mentions some further points:

- (6) aid can be more concentrated and thus cheaper in settlements;
- (7) by keeping refugees together, their eventual repatriation is facilitated; and
- (8) governments want to keep refugees out of cities, where they would add to urban problems.

None of these arguments can, I think, be considered valid. While concern about changing proportions of ethnic groups is perhaps understandable, it hardly deserves support. The fear of alien criminals is inspired by xenophobia rather than by evidence; if there is higher delinquency among refugees, it is likely to be due to restrictions imposed on their legal economic activities. As regards the supposed autonomy of settlements, they are highly artificial communities. Set up not by the refugees but by others, more often than not joining people from diverse social and cultural backgrounds whose original leadership structure may have collapsed, and controlled by a bureaucracy of camp authorities, refugees in settlements do not necessarily have more autonomy than the self-settled (cf. Harrell-Bond, 1986: 87-104). As for the arguments quoted by Rogge, setting up and maintaining settlements is more expensive than assisting self-settled refugees to achieve the same standard of living as enjoyed by those in the settlements, as will be demonstrated below. When mentioning the

argument on repatriation he must have had have forced repatriation in mind; if the conditions are favourable to voluntary repatriation, refugees will return home without having to be herded into lorries. The final argument depends on whether one is talking about keeping rural people out of the cities by force (a policy which is doomed to fail) or about rural development in order to make the rural areas more attractive. In the latter case, the argument is the same as (1): whether economic integration is more easily achieved in spontaneous or in organized settlement. That argument is, of course, the one with which this article is primarily concerned.

Whatever the arguments in its favour, the policy of organized settlement has not been a success: most refugees in Africa are spontaneously settled. In the early 1970s, less than 20 per cent were in organized settlements (Gould, 1974: 423). A recent source gives the proportion as 25 per cent (Cuénod, 1989: 8). There are two possible reasons: either governments and UNHCR are unable to accommodate the refugees, or the latter are unwilling to be accommodated in the settlements earmarked for them. As a matter of fact, both reasons apply. UNHCR's budget is already strained by the burden of supporting Africa's refugees, and settling four times as many would be quite beyond its present resources. As for host country governments, the potential for settling more refugees depends on what type of settlement one opts for. These types are discussed later in this article. However, resource limitations are not the sole reason for the failure of settlement policies. Many host governments (including the Sudan) attempt to draw more refugees into the settlements, but most refugees are apparently reluctant. They seem to prefer the hard struggle for survival as underprivileged aliens among the local population to the settlements where supposedly their subsistence is guaranteed, where social services such as education, health and water are provided for them, and where they are expertly assisted in becoming self-sufficient. A curious phenomenon indeed.

Naturally, this has given rise to considerable debate on the issue. A problem was that very little was known about the spontaneously settled refugees. One of the pioneers in this respect was the anthropologist Art Hansen, who studied Angolan refugees in Zambia from 1966 onwards both the spontaneously settled and those in government settlements. He concluded that refugees were reluctant to live in government settlements because they wanted to maintain control over their own lives, which was worth more to them than the higher living standard prevailing in the settlement (Hansen, 1981: 31). Furthermore, they feared forcible repatriation. Thus, one of the reasons why governments would favour organized settlement is the very reason why refugees might dislike it: Hansen's Angolans were eager to repatriate, but only when they thought conditions had improved sufficiently, not when the Zambian government would deem it convenient.

At the seminar on Rural Refugees in Africa held at Arusha in 1976, it was concluded that "non-organized settlements have a better chance of developing self-reliance and self-management while avoiding the dependence mentality which has often been found in organized settlements" (Kibreab, 1985: 100, quoted by Wijbrandi, 1986: 10). However, the recommendations of the Arusha seminar did not result in a change of policy. Several students of refugee issues, notably Tristram Betts and Robert Chambers criticized Hansen's views on

spontaneous settlement: the burden of refugees on the host country needed more attention (Betts, 1981; Chambers, 1986); self-settled refugees were often extremely poor and economically insecure; and organized settlements were improving their performance (quoted in Wijbrandi, 1986: 10-11). Wijbrandi concludes his review of the discussion with the statement that "there is a growing consensus among scholars, governments and international and voluntary organizations that organized settlement of refugees should be given preference to self-settlement" (Ibid.: 12). However, Wijbrandi goes on to say, this conclusion is not definitive as there is a need for further research on spontaneous settlement. He and his colleagues carried out such research, and further fieldwork was done by the team of which the present author was a member. This allows us to take a closer look at the issues of the burden on the host, and the economic situation of the refugees. Based partly on Wijbrandi's work and partly on other studies now available, some further statements on the potential of organized settlements can also be made.

#### Economic conditions for refugees: some empirical evidence

Wijbrandi's team made two comparisons between a location with self-settled refugees and an organized refugee settlement in the Gedaref region of Eastern Sudan. In both cases the locations were chosen in such a way that the principal differences between self-settled refugees and those in settlements could be ascribed to the settlement type - other relevant conditions being similar. The first study (1983) was concerned with the little town of Doka and the nearby settlement of Um Rakoba; this is a so-called land settlement, where plots of land are issued by the Sudanese government to refugees. On the whole, living conditions of refugees appeared to be better in the settlement: 67 per cent of households attained an income considered sufficient for basic needs, compared to 52 per cent among the self-settled; moreover, those in the settlement were better housed and did not have to pay rent, and they also had wider access to education and health facilities. From a social and a legal point of view, the situation of the refugees in the settlement was considered preferable. In both locations, however, the economic position of refugees was much below that of the Sudanese population, due to their limited access to means of production and due to the various restrictions imposed on them (Wijbrandi, 1984).<sup>11</sup> The second part of the field research, undertaken six months later, compared refugees and Sudanese in the town of Wad el-Hilew and in the settlement of Abuda. In this case, conditions among self-settled refugees were notably better: in Wad el-Hilew 61 per cent of the refugees had an income above Wijbrandi's poverty line, compared to only 13 per cent in Abuda. As in the previous case, housing and health services were better in the settlement, but the percentage of schoolgoing refugee children was higher among the self-settled (Wijbrandi, 1985).

From these findings, Wijbrandi concludes that the settlement type itself is not a decisive factor in economic integration: in the one

case the refugees in the settlement were better off, in the other it was the self-settled (1986: 123). This conclusion, however, may be challenged: in the first place, the differences in the latter case are far larger than in the former: taken together, the two samples indicate that 57 per cent of self-settled households attain an income above the minimum compared to 40 per cent in the settlements. The economic situation had worsened during the time elapsed between the two studies; this would have increased the number below the minimum, but one would have expected that this effect would be most pronounced among the self-settled who did not have the access to relief food enjoyed by those in settlements. Secondly, and more importantly, even if the proportion below the poverty line in settlements would be equal to that among the self-settled, this would only mean that the vast amounts of aid provided both on relief and on making the refugees self-sufficient have resulted in a living standard not notably higher - and quite possibly lower - than that of refugees who remained entirely outside the aid network and who had to cope with enormous odds.

Therefore, I think Wijbrandi's research supports quite a different conclusion: that the settlement policy has utterly failed to enhance the economic integration of refugees. Apart from Wijbrandi's study there is scant other evidence comparing economic conditions in the two settlement forms. Bulcha (1988), who did research in three settlements and three locations among self-settled refugees, compares the length of employment during the year 1982. The figures are as follows:

Table 1. Length of employment by type of settlement (%)

Months	Settlement type	
	Organized	Spontaneous
0-3	25	14
4-8	33	17
9-12	42	69
Total %	100	100
N	280	133

Source: Based on Bulcha, 1988: 157.

From this table, it would appear that the self-settled have a more secure livelihood than the refugees living in settlements. Table 2 presents a different picture regarding incomes: in urban areas the self-settled are better off, but in the rural areas the reverse seems to be the case, with 92 per cent far below the minimum necessary for subsistence (given by Bulcha as £S625 per year for rural areas and £S825 for urban areas). It is difficult to understand how those 92 per cent can survive, taking into account that they do not receive any aid. However, the representativity and statistical significance of these figures may be doubted, in view of the very small number of interviews. Where the average of rural and urban refugees is taken, the picture is again favourable to the self-settled (Bulcha, 1988: 167).

Table 2. Income distribution by type of settlement

Income (£S)	Settlement type			
	Org. rural	Spont. rural	Org. urban	Spont. urban
0	26	24	19	18
1-229	13	68	10	3
300-599	30	6	25	7
600-899	16	0	32	13
900-1199	7	2	3	12
1200-1499	4	0	7	25
>1500	4	0	4	22
Total X	100	100	100	100
N	134	54	93	60

Source: Calculated from Bulcha, 1988: 162

The oldest settlement scheme in the Eastern Sudan, Qalaa en-Nahal, may have achieved self-sufficiency at family level, after many years of failures. However, the costly water supply and tractor schemes may have to be subsidized indefinitely (Rogge, 1985: 106-107) - in other words, community self-sufficiency was not remotely in sight in 1985, after sixteen years of operation.

Why would it be so difficult to achieve a higher level of self-sufficiency in settlements? One important reason has been that insufficient land was made available to refugees in the settlements. The official allotment is 10 feddan (a feddan is about one acre) per family, but Wijbrandi reports that in Um Rakoba and Abuda refugees in practice received only 5 feddan; according to data he received from the authorities, 39 per cent of all households in Um Rakoba were issued such allotments; in his sample, however, only 9 per cent of households had actually been given land (1984: 93). In Abuda the situation was better: 77 per cent had been provided with a plot (1985: 58). In Qalaa en-Nahal, the survey mentioned above found that 90 per cent of the refugees had received no land at all, and of the remainder 15 per cent had received less than the stipulated acreage (Betts, 1982: 92). Cree (1983: 3) reports that land allocation was a problem also at the settlement of Um Ali. Abuda is regarded by Jönsson & Cree (1982: 22-23) as having relatively favourable prospects of attaining at least self-sufficiency in staple food. However, this is on the basis of 10 feddan per family, which - as Wijbrandi says - "stands in shrill contrast to the actual situation in Abuda" (1985: 58).

It is not that the Sudanese government is unwilling to grant land to the settlers; rather, it found it more difficult to do so than it had anticipated (this difficulty will be discussed in the next section, when I come to speak about the burden of refugees). Instead, since the late 1970s the government has opted for two alternative settlement forms in addition to the land settlement: the wage-earning rural settlement and the peri-urban settlement. The Sudan has large areas of commercial farming, where the supply of labour is a principal bottleneck. Most of the labourers in commercial farming are peasants, who subsist for part of the year on their own meagre farms and for another part on casual work on the large estates. It was thought that

by locating refugee settlements within the areas of large-scale agriculture, the refugees would not need to be given land, but could earn a living as agricultural labourers, therewith making a positive contribution to the Sudanese economy.<sup>12</sup> The peri-urban settlement was intended to accommodate those refugees now self-settled in towns: a settlement near the town would be created for them with external financing, which would permit them to continue their income-generating activities while removing the pressure they exert on the urban infrastructure.

A consultant for UNHCR carried out a study on the economic viability of five wage-earning settlements (four rural and one urban). Judging an annual income of about fS500 to be the minimum for satisfying basic needs, he estimated actual income per household in the four rural settlements at slightly below fS300, and potential income (assuming eight months of available employment and optimal refugee participation) at less than fS400 per year. In other words, the outlook for economic self-sufficiency even at household level was bleak, and income levels were actually worse than in the land settlements. Among Sudanese villagers in the same area, only 1-14 per cent of households had incomes below fS500 (quoting a UNHCR/ILO survey). The report concluded that three out of the four rural settlements were not actually or potentially viable, while the fourth was marginally viable (Purcell, 1983: 55-61). The main difficulty with these settlements is the seasonal nature of agricultural employment, which does not permit the labourers to earn wages throughout the year - and unlike the Sudanese 'semi-proletarians', they do not have plots of their own with which to supplement their wages.

The viability of peri- or semi-urban settlements appears to be somewhat better. For the Ethiopian refugees in the Sudan, only two have been created: one at Khashm el-Girba, the other, called Tawawa, just outside the large town of Gedaref. In both of them, refugees are better off than in the rural settlements of either type (ILO/UNHCR, 1984: 83). Khashm el-Girba is regarded by Purcell as having an acceptable economic base (1983: 61). Tawawa, however, shows lower incomes than among the urban self-settled (Table 2). This is confirmed by Post (1985: 73, 118). The greater distance to the sites of work is undoubtedly a major reason: most inhabitants of Tawawa depend on economic activities within the settlement itself, which is poor (Ibid.: 81). External assistance for income-generating activities has been given, but it has failed to provide the refugees in settlements with an income equal to that of the self-settled. As the ILO/UNHCR documents points out:

"The activities supported by voluntary agencies are heavily supported financially and administratively. Most of the projects could be considered as social welfare schemes rather than socially and economically viable activities, and it is doubtful that these activities would survive the withdrawal of the support" (1984: 141).

I think a fairly good case can be made that, in spite of massive aid to settlements for Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees in the Eastern Sudan, the refugees settled there are no better off - and frequently worse off - than the self-settled who survive largely without aid. Harrell-Bond (1986) provides circumstantial evidence suggesting the same conclusion for Ugandan refugees in the Southern Sudan (cf., for instance, pp. 351-355).

These cases are not sufficient, of course, to prove that settlements cannot be beneficial to refugees. Other countries may have had more successful experiences with them. Tanzania has been regarded as a country where organized settlement has been quite successful (Daley, 1984; Gasarasi, 1987). Unfortunately, there has been no systematic comparison with the conditions of the self-settled. Even in Tanzania, many refugees prefer to be self-settled and attempts have been made to move them to the settlements forcibly (Daley, 1984: 111). Armstrong (1987: 89) voices the impression that self-settled refugees are worse off than those in settlements, but not worse than the local population. He also remarks that there "seems to be a recurring trend" of refugees leaving older settlements where aid has been withdrawn (Ibid.: 100). Apparently, lasting community self-sufficiency was not achieved. In Zambia's Meheba settlement for Angolan refugees, material living conditions for refugees were regarded by Hansen as better than among the self-settled, yet very few refugees went there voluntarily (Hansen, 1982: 30).

Whereas the record of settlements is not encouraging as far as income-generating activities are concerned, it cannot be denied that in most cases social services such as health and education are better than among the self-settled. The same is often true for housing, and sometimes for water. Of course, the same result could have been achieved if the aid spent on them had been used to assist self-settled refugees. On the whole, the aid spent on refugees in settlements cannot be shown to have had a positive impact on their economic wellbeing.

There are, however, two points that must be raised against this conclusion. Primo, it is likely that the so-called vulnerable groups - handicapped and elderly people, single-parent households, orphans (cf. Pankhurst, 1984) - tend to be more heavily represented in settlements; such groups have greater difficulty in earning a living, which reduces the potential of the settlements for becoming self-sufficient. Indeed, it may be part of some refugees' survival strategy to let some relatives who are less capable of fending for themselves live in a settlement where they can depend on aid. In this way, the existence of settlements contributes to the economic integration of the self-settled. Secundo, while organized settlement might not be the best solution for refugees, it may still be preferable in that it minimizes the burden imposed by the refugee influx on the host country. The latter point is taken up in the next section; the former I shall discuss presently.

All ordered societies have mechanisms for providing for those who are unable to fend for themselves. Some are better at this than others, depending on the level of economic development, the prevailing ideology, and the nature of the disaster that the society in question has to cope with. Refugees have faced a very large disaster and do not constitute an ordered society. Relief is extended to them in the initial stages in relief camps; those who are able to fend for themselves gradually drift out of the camps, while those who are not remain behind and are eventually transported to permanent settlements. The availability of this option, combined with the extreme difficulties faced by the self-settled in surviving economically, make it unfeasible for the latter to care for vulnerable persons in their midst. If the funds now spent on settlements would be used to assist the self-

settled, and if existing restrictions on their integration imposed by the host government would be removed, they would probably be able to look after destitute members of their communities themselves.<sup>13</sup> If not, and if no better way can be found to assist the vulnerable, settlements might continue to have a role to play in the economic integration of refugees - but their goals would have to be quite different from what they are now.

### **The burden of refugees**

If settlements are not good for refugees, might they not be good for the host country, in that they avoid the burden which the self-settled impose on the population? The impact of a large influx of refugees on the region where they settle was the principal object of the study in which the author participated in 1986/87, in the region of Kassala - also in the Eastern Sudan (Kuhlman, 1990). The impact of refugees turns out to be a highly complex matter, very difficult to quantify. The region one studies is likely to be subject to many factors causing social and economic change, of which the refugee influx is only one. Moreover, the effects of a mass influx of refugees differ by economic class and - in a plural society such as the Sudan - also by ethnicity. However, the results of the study do permit some general conclusions.

While it cannot be denied that the influx of refugees did constitute a burden, its impact was by no means uniformly negative to the host population. In the town, they had contributed to an expansion of the economy, in demand as well as in the supply of labour. Commercial horticulture near Kassala and mechanized agriculture throughout the southern part of the Eastern Region have benefited enormously from the influx of cheap labour; many among the former labourer class of West African origin have not become unemployed as a result, but emancipated to better economic positions thanks to the general expansion of the economy. Since 1978 the Sudan has been in an economic crisis, which has caused declining real incomes for most; but this decline does not appear to be any worse in Kassala than in less refugee-affected areas such as the Central Region.

The only sector which was clearly negatively affected by the influx of refugees is that of small-scale rainfed agriculture, where their numbers severely tax the limited natural resources and where ecological degradation due to population pressure is clearly in evidence. Overgrazing and, in places, over-cultivation are causing accelerated erosion. Water resources are quite possibly insufficient to support a settled population throughout the year. Deforestation makes the firewood supply into an ever greater problem. Ironically, it is in the villages of that zone that the least complaints against refugees are heard. This is because the refugees who have settled there belong to the same ethnic groups as the local Sudanese. Both were nomads until the recent past, and the villages in this zone are the result of a settlement process which is still continuing. What difference does it make whether someone was forced to settle because of the economic

decline of nomadism on one side of the border or because of political violence on the other?

To be sure, the absorption capacity of a region may be severely taxed by rapid population growth such as occurs with mass influx of refugees; and indeed, at the time of the research it was too early to assess the full impact of the disastrous drought from which the Kassala region was discovering, and which also brought a renewed large flow of refugees. But the large and steady flow from 1967 to the early 1980s did not result in an overall deterioration of either incomes or employment among the host population - except for the small farmers in the rainfed sector.

So much for the refugees' impact on employment and incomes. However, we must also consider the effects on other aspects of the economy. The water supply in Kassala town is under pressure from population growth (caused by natural growth and by rural-urban migration as well as by refugee influx); however, water resources are adequate and the fact that they are not yet adequately harnessed is due to the general economic situation in the Sudan, not to the refugee influx. Housing has become more congested since the coming of the refugees (there is 19 per cent less space per person than twenty years previously), but curiously enough the rents have not increased relatively to the general price level: instead, many Sudanese have responded to the demand for rented housing by either building houses or renting out part of their own house.

Education and health services do have to cope with increased demand due to the refugee influx, but this increase is much less than the number of refugees would lead one to suppose: in the case of education access of refugees is restricted, and in the cases of both education and health there are facilities which have been created specially for refugees and which partly compensate for the burden. In 1986, the proportion of refugees among the pupils in government primary schools in the research area was 12 per cent, while they made up 20.5 per cent of the total population in the area; in secondary schools the proportion of refugee pupils was 10 per cent. In the health sector, there are no statistics which show the number of refugee patients: Sudanese and refugees are treated without discrimination, and no patient is asked to which group he or she belongs. The proportions are likely to reflect those among the population as a whole, with the understanding that facilities for refugees also cater for both them and Sudanese. Thus, the overall burden is less than proportional to the number of refugees but a burden is certainly is. However, one may legitimately ask why this burden could not be borne by the host country: if the refugees contribute to a higher regional income from which these services are financed, why could the state not finance the necessary expansion in them? The answer is, of course, that social services are at present not adequately financed in the Sudan because of the economic crisis and the crisis of the state; but for that refugees cannot be blamed. It is a fact that the expansion in social services over the last twenty years has lagged far behind the increase in population. This means that the burden of refugees is expressed in deteriorating services rather than in increased government expenditure.

Self-settled refugees suffer many disadvantages because of their lack of legal status: they are subject to travel restrictions; they are

liable to be detained by police at any time (a frequent occurrence especially in Khartoum); they cannot obtain a business licence from local authorities; and because most do not have a work permit, as employees they are at the mercy of their employers' whims - which makes them into a docile and cheap labour force, undercutting their Sudanese colleagues. In view of the positive effects which they have had on several sectors of the regional economy, the observer may wonder whether with less restrictions on refugees' economic activities those positive effects might not have been even larger than they are. Higher aggregate regional incomes can also be taxed to provide the necessary financing for expanding social services. While special aid to these services is necessary to cope with the initial shock of a mass influx, in the longer run the need for such aid must disappear - provided the refugees are enabled to acquire adequate incomes.

Thus, the burden of self-settled refugees needs to be qualified: in most respects it is far less than one would think from just adding more beneficiaries to a fixed amount of resources, and there are significant positive effects to compensate for part of it. Moreover, with more enlightened policies the positive effects might have been enhanced and the burden would have been lighter. Yet, a burden it unquestionably remains. But what about the impact of the settlements? Whereas the financial costs for setting up and running the settlements is borne by foreign donors (mainly UNHCR),<sup>14</sup> the host country provides the land. In the Sudan it was thought at first that giving land to refugees would be a boon rather than a burden to the country. The country is large and thinly populated, with much of its land resources being unused or underused. The settlement refugees could help to realize the Sudan's potential for agricultural development. In economic terms, the opportunity cost of land was regarded as small or even negative. Yet, as we saw in the previous section, the government finds it difficult to make sufficient land available to refugees.

The degree to which land may be under- or over-utilized is not a given quantity, because it depends on the technology applied. Land may be thinly populated, yet utilized to the full or even over-exploited with the technology available to the users. Land which is not cultivated at a particular time may yet play an essential role in the local production system: it may be used as pasture, as a reserve of forest products, or left fallow as part of a shifting cultivation system. If part of such land is expropriated for refugee settlement, the balance of the existing agrarian system may be upset. The local population will either resist such encroachment or, seeing that with investment the potential of the land is raised, attempt to benefit from the increase in value themselves.

Of the former case we saw the results in the previous section; the latter is exemplified by the scheme at Qalaa en-Nahal. The area is fertile, but it suffers from two problems: there is no permanent water, and the soil is too heavy to cultivate efficiently without the aid of tractors. Hence, it was little used and considered a suitable area for refugee settlement - with the appropriate investments in tractors and water supply. Once these were available, however, Sudanese nationals also became interested in the land and by 1980 a survey of the agency EuroAction-ACORD found that 45 per cent of the area under crops was cultivated by Sudanese farmers (Betts, 1982: 91). The Sudanese

government had clearly been too optimistic in its estimates of the amounts of land that could actually be issued to refugees.

Obviously, if it is so difficult to make land available to refugees, the cost of organized settlements to the host country must be substantial. The initial optimism was probably due to the fact that the government simply appropriated land from the rural population.<sup>15</sup> It could afford to believe that the opportunity cost of the land was low because it let others pay that cost. The cost of wage-earning and peri-urban organized settlements is lower, of course, as land needs to be provided only for residential purposes; in rural wage-earning organized settlements, however, self-sufficiency is even more difficult to achieve than in the land settlements. Only the peri-urban settlements might be considered justifiable, in the sense that the cost to the host country is relatively low and the potential for self-sufficiency reasonable - which is not to say that they are, on balance, preferable to spontaneous organized settlement in urban areas.

In fact, wage-earning settlements entail a different and seldom noticed cost to the host country. The food aid given to those settlements without family self-sufficiency serves in effect to subsidize the Sudanese commercial farmers: they enable refugees to work for wages below those on which Sudanese workers could subsist. In this way, they undercut not only wage opportunities but also wage levels and working conditions for the Sudanese.

## Conclusions

On the basis of the limited evidence presented in this article, it is not possible to make a definitive conclusion as to which of the two major alternatives for the settlement of refugees in Africa performs better in terms of economic integration as I have defined it - much less to state which is preferable, all things considered. For that the data at our disposal are too crude and too few. Nevertheless, the evidence strongly suggests that (1) the massive external intervention necessitated by the policy of organized settlement has - at least in the case of Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees in the Sudan - failed to make the refugees self-sufficient or even to make them better off than the self-settled; and (2) that it is not as effective in lessening the economic burden of refugees on the host country as had been thought - partly because the burden of the self-settled is not an unmitigated one, and partly because the cost of organized settlements is substantial not only to the international community but to the host country as well.

The experience in other cases of refugees in Africa may be different, of course. This is difficult to evaluate, as there is a lack of empirical data on self-settled refugees and on the impact of both the self-settled and those in settlements on the host country. The reported success of Tanzania's settlements must be due to a large extent to the generosity with which land was made available (either

because there really was plenty of unused land or because the government was able to overcome resistance among the local population); this generosity has been expressed also in that the Tanzanian government treated refugees equally with nationals, even in that the latter were also subject to enforced resettlement under the Ujamaa ideology (Rogge, 1981: 206-209). Tanzania has even granted naturalization to refugees, something rarely done elsewhere in Africa. The common reluctance of refugees to be resettled, while due to several reasons, is at least in part a reflection on unattractive economic conditions in the organized settlements.

This is not to say that the self-settled tend to be well integrated economically. On the contrary, their standard of living is commonly lower than that of even the more disadvantaged groups of nationals. Nor is the burden they impose on the host population to be minimized. What I do suggest is that policies could be designed to enhance economic integration among the self-settled which would stand a much better chance of success than the prevalent policy of favouring organized settlement. Whereas even under present conditions economic integration among the self-settled appears to be better than in the organized settlements, appropriate policies could do much to improve it - both with regard to the economic situation of the refugees themselves and with regard to the burden they impose on the host country. At present, this integration is hampered by the restrictions imposed on refugees by host country governments, and aid agencies appear to be less willing to share the burden where the self-settled are concerned. If those institutional constraints could be overcome, and if host country governments could face their responsibilities more squarely, both the refugees and the host populations would be better off.

On the part of the host country, such policies could include the lifting of restrictions on the participation of the refugees in the national economy. First and foremost, this would mean the legalization of the status of the self-settled, and therewith the removal of any threat to relocate them forcibly to settlements. Such a simple stroke of the pen would - in the Sudan - automatically mean that refugees would be entitled to a work permit. Other important restrictions are those on travel within the country and on conducting business activities. Removing them would enable the host country to utilize the human potential of the refugees to the full. This does not necessarily mean that there would be no restrictions applying to refugees at all. In the Sudan, for instance, the Regulation of Asylum Act (1974) states that the Minister will determine where the refugees may reside. The policy of organized settlement is based on this clause, but it could also be interpreted as signifying that the Minister may denote certain regions for refugee settlement. Even while refugees may travel freely, their work permit will state where they live and they may be required to justify a sojourn in a different area.

The international community would have to commit its financial support to programmes designed for assisting self-settled refugees and for helping the host country to cope with the burden they impose. This would require the removal of present institutional barriers which prevent agencies concerned with aid to refugees from contributing to programmes for both refugees and host population, and agencies concerned with development aid from helping refugees. Research has an

important role to play in identifying those socio-economic groups that are most in need of assistance, and in outlining the ways in which assistance could most effectively be used. In the Kassala research it was found that such target groups would at the same time include the majority of the refugees and those among the nationals that were most severely affected by the refugee burden. Such assistance programmes would be concerned with income-generating activities. Outside this domain, there are other specific forms of assistance to refugee-affected areas which will be useful: to social services and infrastructure, in order to compensate for the initial adjustment to a large increase of population; and assistance in the fields of soil and water conservation and reforestation, to cope with the environmental impact of refugees, which is one of the most notable aspects of the refugee burden in Eastern Sudan.

Of course, as pointed out in the introduction, economic integration is only one consideration in refugee policy. It is important in that it is often used as justification for a policy and, as I have argued, wrongly so. While it may be impossible to sustain such justification, there may still be compelling reasons for not adopting a policy appropriate to economic integration. These reasons have to do with the institutional interests of those who make those policies. While this is perhaps only to be expected, it leads often to a misperception of the refugee condition, and to a failure of those policies to achieve their stated objectives. Refugees are seen not only as people in need, but as people in need of those things which aid organizations want to provide: certain goods and certain kinds of know-how. Host governments only define persons who have fled from a neighbouring country as refugees when they want to settle them in camps and have them provided with those things which donors are eager to provide. This can be because the country of asylum wishes to embarrass the country of origin by publicizing its domestic problems; because it is feared that the refugees might upset the local balance of power and should therefore be isolated in a remote area;<sup>16</sup> or because it is faced with a crisis such as mass flight, which it cannot handle without external support. In a sense, people become refugees because the host government sees fit to capture them under the aid umbrella.<sup>17</sup>

#### Notes

1. An example: in 1986, only a few thousand Ethiopian refugees were able to leave the Sudan for resettlement, out of a total of over 650,000 (Neuwirth, 1988: 31).
2. A somewhat different terminology is used by Rogge (1987: 87): self-support means independence from food handouts, self-reliance means producing almost all daily needs, self-sufficiency is complete independence from any external help. The latter two are equivalent to my family and community self-sufficiency, respectively.
3. Not, it may be remarked, the problems that *caused* flight. Some authors (e.g. Zolberg c.s., 1989: 263-268; Bulcha, 1988: 235; Wijbrandi, 1986: 128) rightly stress that a true solution to the problems of refugees can only be achieved by addressing the 'root causes' of flight.

However, this article is concerned with the question of what can be done in the absence of such a fundamental solution, by those who have little power to address the root cause - such as host governments and UNHCR (cf. Aga Khan c.s., 1986: 57; Stein, 1986: 267).

4. The distinctions between integration, assimilation, marginalization and segregation have been cast into a model by the psychologist John W. Berry (e.g., 1988: 45). All four may be considered as modes of acculturation, in which process there are two basic dimensions: the degree of contact between migrants and natives, and the extent to which the former maintain their own cultural identity. No contact and maintaining one's own identity means segregation or separation, whereas intensive contact and loss of identity results in assimilation. It may also happen that the group withdraws into itself, yet its culture is destroyed - this is what Berry calls marginalization, and examples are provided by many American Indian groups and by the Australian aboriginals. Finally, a combination of intensive contact with the dominant society while also maintaining one's own culture is termed integration. I disagree with Berry in that I think his two dimensions are not logically independent from one another: maintaining one's own cultural identity has to go together with intensive social relations within one's cultural group, and this means less contacts outside. Yet, as a midway compromise between full segregation and total loss of cultural identity his concept is elucidating, and highly suited to a plural society.
5. A plural society is defined as one in which co-exist not only various ethnic groups, but where each group occupies its own niche in the economy. As economic role tends to be strongly correlated with power, income and status, this means that social stratification has a strong ethnic bias. This does not necessarily mean that socio-economic position is totally determined by ethnicity: it is sufficient that the two are correlated. The term originates with J.S. Furnivall in a work on colonial Indonesia (1939).
6. Each culture has its own criteria of what constitutes an acceptable minimum standard of living. This is the only valid approach to a 'poverty line': general criteria such as proposed in Dudley Seers' famous definition of development (Seers, 1969) cannot be universally applied, much less specified. The minimum requirements for physiological survival (another possible approach) are far below what human beings consider a life worth living; and moreover, in many if not all cultures some values are placed even above the biological survival of the individual - as even the most doctrinaire neo-classical economist must admit. On this issue, see the discussion in Sen, 1981: 12-18.
7. This meaning of the word 'economic' combines elements of Lionel Robbins' famous definition of economics (1932) and Polanyi's 'substantive' definition (1958).
8. There are a few exceptions, notably the case of the refugees from Portuguese Guinea who fled to Senegal during the war of independence in the 1960s and early 1970s. The Senegalese government took no measures to settle them in camps, but encouraged them to settle among the local population (Rogge, 1981: 200). There are other cases where people fled their country because of oppression but were never recognized as refugees, because the host country government did not find it politically opportune to advertise the existence of a problem or to invite foreign involvement in its relations with a neighbouring state (cf. Zolberg et al., 1989: 37, 58).
9. Most of the the arguments that follow are listed in Wijbrandi, 1986 (pp. 11-12). However, my treatment of them is quite different from his.
10. However, it would be wrong to suppose that most refugees are revolutionaries bent on overthrowing the regime in their home country, while the host government is filled with the most peaceful intentions towards its neighbour. In the case of Eritrean refugees in the Sudan, the majority are not engaged in any political activity against Ethiopia; the Sudanese government, on the other hand, actively supports the Eritrean guerrillas - as Ethiopia does for the Southern Sudanese rebels.
11. It must, however, be pointed out that the sample of refugees in Doka was drawn from one particular group of Ethiopian refugees, namely those who could be easily identified. This means a certain ethnic bias, as those refugees who belong to the Beni Amer tribe (found

- on both sides of the border) were left outside the sample. As the latter integrate more easily, the sample probably erred in ascribing too low average incomes to the self-settled.
12. Wage labour is also a factor in the incomes of refugees in land settlements.
  13. It must be admitted that this does not necessarily mean that the vulnerable will be cared for adequately. However, inadequacies will be such as occur commonly in poor countries and cannot be ascribed to refugee status.
  14. Some help is also given to compensate for the burden of self-settled refugees. In the case of Kassala, UNHCR provides some assistance to the departments of health and education in the region, and special projects have been designed after the Second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa (ICARA II) in 1984: extension of electricity and water, and a credit scheme for the rural areas.
  15. In the Sudan, land which has not been specifically recognized as freehold is by law the property of the state. This means virtually all land, with the exception of some large estates belonging to a few rich families.
  16. This was clearly a consideration in moving the first wave of Eritrean refugees to Qalaa en-Nahal (Karadawi, 1983).
  17. This is a central theme in Barbara Harrell-Bond's *Imposing aid* (1986).

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