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UGANDAN REFUGEES IN THE SUDAN PART II: THE QUEST FOR SELF-SUFFICIENCY IN PLANNED RURAL SETTLEMENTS

by Barbara Harrell-Bond

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This Report aims to bring to life the experience of agency personnel and refugees in southern Sudan through case studies illustrating common problems. The siting of refugee settlements and their physical design are intended to pave the way for self-sufficient maintenance within a short period of time.

. . . our people believe that to be a refugee is to be taken care of by UNHCR [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees]. But the people on the border — they don't think they are refugees. After crossing the Uganda/Sudan border, they believe that since they are still self-supporting, they are not refugees. When they see you pack to come to the settlement, they ask "So you have accepted to be a refugees." They use the "s" on the end of the word "refugee" even if you are a single person, without knowing the connotation, even when they are actually refugees in the Sudan! People would have survived well on the borders if, and only if . . . the Uganda Government [had not been allowed] to violate international law and come in to harass refugees in another country, another sovereign country . . . . Somebody who has crossed the border and taken asylum somewhere should be safe. But here, to be safe is to be safe in inverted commas. It's unfortunate.[1]

Assistance programs funded by the international community for Ugandan refugees in southern Sudan are aimed at helping them attain self-sufficiency in the shortest possible time. In order to qualify for assistance, however, refugees must live in one of the planned rural settlements, and many resist the submergence of personal identity and self-reliance implicit in becoming a "refugee." This Report describes an approach developed in the process of establishing several such rural settlements.

The main objectives of my research were to investigate the impediments to self-sufficiency and to devise means of helping aid agencies increase refugee participation at all levels from the onset of an emergency. It is widely accepted that the manner in which relief is proffered and the role the refugee is forced to assume in the initial period of any emergency are major factors in the attitudes and behavior they manifest then and later on. Methodologically, the research was participatory, "action-oriented," and consultative.[2] Western Equatoria was an ideal setting for the study: it contained three settlements established in 1980 and 1981 as well as new settlements set up to handle the influx in early 1982, and there was a continuing and escalating state of emergency. With the founding of each new settlement, it was possible to put into practice lessons learned earlier.

This Report also aims to bring to life the experience of agency personnel and refugees in the field through case studies selected to illustrate the more general problems. The research is incomplete: refugees are still engaged in collecting the data to measure the extent to which their communities are moving toward objectives of the program. Nevertheless, it is useful to report some of the findings to allow a wider audience to engage in debates on the

issues they raise. As Pearse and Stiefel have pointed out:

If we admit that at best social science research can only aid in bringing a little more clarity into debates on policy issues, and leave it at that, we may underrate its potential for contributing to the process of change. Intellectual perceptions in the ordering and analysis of social realities do occasionally interact with social forces at crucial moments and thus influence the directions they take and the outcome of social conflicts. An imaginative social science approach, through the selection and formulation of research tools and methods and widespread communication of of the results can frequently increase the opportunities for governments or other agents of change to carry through radical social development policies and measures.[3]

The failures of aid and development programs in the Third World to improve the lives of recipients and the deleterious effects these programs had upon the economies of poor countries have been amply documented. Attempts to assist refugees – the poorest people in the world – to become self-sufficient (however defined), bring to light the underlying contradictions of *all* aid programs. Poverty is, after all, a political problem, the consequence of the unequal distribution of power and resources. Applying the label "humanitarian" to the assistance provided to refugees has allowed some members of the international aid community to neglect these realities, while the relief programs they designed contributed to the increasing powerlessness of the recipients.

Now, however, "self-sufficiency," "development," "participation," have become the vogue words among policymakers. In their seminal article, Pearse and Stiefel ask under what conditions will participatory institutions and organizations which "empower" the worker, the citizen, the share tenant, the field-laborer, the "tribal," the petty cultivator, the artisan, and the fisherman be tolerated by governments. "How will they react to participatory movements that seek improved livelihood outside the framework of official institutions?" Leaving aside the more complicated question of a host government's response to a refugee community organized for self-sufficiency on genuinely participatory lines, the most immediate question is the extent to which the aid agencies and personnel would actually welcome such a development.

At present, the headquarters of many agencies are too often ignorant of what is actually happening in the field.[4] Their hierarchical structure means the information and experience gathered in the field is filtered through a number of bureaucratic levels before it reaches the top. Visits by field delegations are brief and their investigations necessarily cursory. Agencies also differ in their reporting requirements for fieldworkers. The more effective – such as OXFAM U.K. – have a system whereby fieldworkers can communicate directly and regularly with the center, and the reliability of fieldworkers' assessments is not judged in terms of their seniority.

Direct reporting allows an agency like OXFAM to react more immediately to changes in local conditions, and thus prevent prolongation of suffering such as I observed in the Sudan. From at least May 20, to July 17, 1982, there were no blankets, tents, cooking pots, buckets, tools, or milk powder for the thousands of refugees, many seriously ill, who were arriving at reception centers and settlements. Throughout the period I was there, food supplies were in short supply. There were few spare parts or tires to keep vehicles on the road. Until late August the only basic tools available in Yei (district headquarters) were a few that one refugee mechanic had brought from Uganda as he escaped. After a visit by the field officer from Nairobi in late July, OXFAM donated a tool box. By October all but three lorries had broken down, although there were thousands of refugees awaiting transport. More than once fuel supplies ran out and it was necessary to rely on the charity of the more efficiently organized agro-forestry agency located there.

Managing an Emergency

Although the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) does not itself normally administer assistance programs directly, in Western Equatoria it took full responsibility in cooperation with two (and later three) voluntary agencies. Usually, it is the host governments who are responsible for distributing food provided by the World Food Programme (WFP), but in southern Sudan, even this is managed by UNHCR. Throughout the time I was in the south, participation by the Sudan Project Management Office (a branch of the Commissioner for Refugees offices in Khartoum) was minimal although invaluable (see Part I).

Refugees moved into southern Sudan at different times and at different points along the border with Uganda and Zaïre in response to changes in the military fortunes of the opposing groups. Owing to the distances involved, together with the state and scarcity of roads and the lack of means of communication, it was very difficult to get accurate, early information about each new influx. The UNHCR sub-office was in Juba, 100 miles from Yei, and another 50 miles from Kaya, the nearest border point where refugees were received. Kajo-Kaji, another major reception area, was 200 miles from Juba. Journeys between centers entail long hours over vehicle-destroying terrain. Until mid-July 1982, Juba remained the center for administration, from which there was radio contact only with Yei.[5]

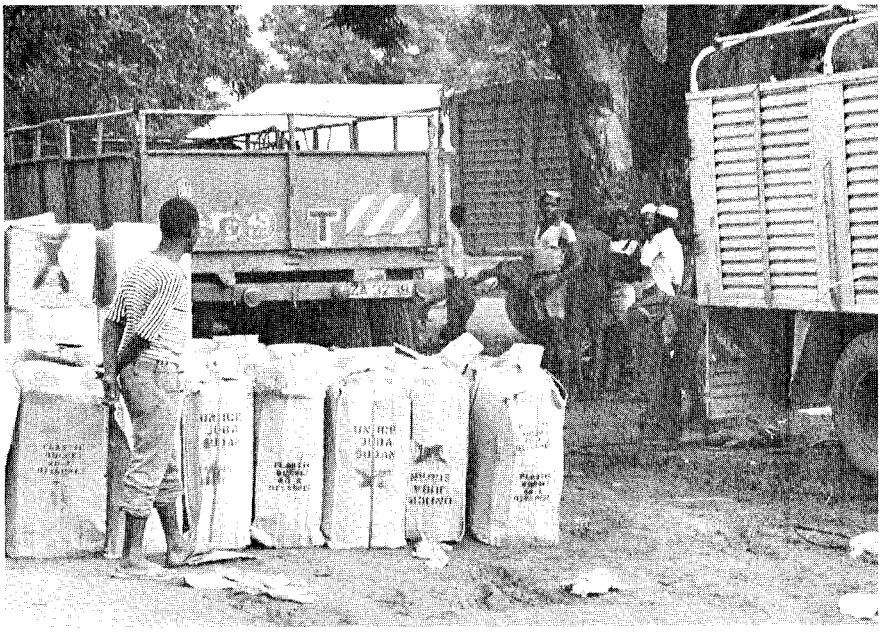
All the agencies were seriously short of staff, expatriates included. Johann Galtung, a well-known Norwegian sociologist, criticized the UN for its belief that high salaries attract the best people, remarking "People with high incomes prefer to remain in the capitals where they can live in splendour consistent with their salaries, and not in villages where most aid projects are carried out."[6] Juba could hardly be described as a place to live in splendor, but it had considerable material advantages – imported food, electricity, water supply – over Yei.

Why rely on expatriate staff at all? In southern Sudan the refugees included large numbers of professionals, often with considerably more appropriate training and experience than the expatriates working for the agencies.[7] Some agencies do employ refugees or locals for responsible posts, but they are rarely – if ever – involved in policy decisions.[8] Despite the need for

medical doctors, two Ugandans who travelled from Nairobi explicitly seeking employment among their own people were turned away. Later, when the scale and seriousness of the emergency were recognized, expatriate medical staff were flown in. UNHCR's method of coping with shortages of staff was to bring in temporary consultants to carry part of the work load, but this made it very difficult to establish a consistent approach. Moreover, some expatriates were less willing than others to bear the "normal" 14-hour day, often 7 days a week.

The duties of the office in Yei included the following: insuring that food was available at the four reception centers on the border and in the transit camps; organizing the daily runs of lorries to the borders to collect refugees; counting the refugees at the reception points and trying to get information on conditions inside Uganda to anticipate future influxes; coordinating information with local government officials, the work of the voluntary agency partners, and their activities with the relevant government offices such as health, education, agriculture, etc.; organizing the transport of building materials to the settlements; finding sites for settlements, including consultation with chiefs and local people; surveying the land for agriculture; determining how water would be supplied, and often organizing the building of access roads and bridges; overseeing the maintenance of vehicles; obtaining fuel supplies; recruiting and overseeing staff; accounting for all expenditure; planning new budgets; reporting to the sub-office in Juba and the branch office in Khartoum; receiving delegations from settlements, other agencies and from abroad; planning and supervising settlements; dealing with outbreaks of violence among refugees or between refugees and local people; starting up schools; and dealing with the problems of individual refugees.

Sometimes as many as one hundred refugees waited in the UNHCR compound in Yei to be seen. They brought with them a diversity of problems to resolve any one of which required a document. For a start, every refugee needed an identity card establishing his status within the Sudan, but the host government could not afford to print new ones for the thousands entering the country in 1982. Yet, in order to leave his settlement, get a prescription ordered by the hospital, get transport to bring his family from the border, be referred for medical treatment elsewhere, visit another settlement, find a place in a secondary school, look for a job, etc., a refugee had to have some document verifying that status.



The labels on relief food remind the refugee who is his benefactor.

Most of the problems refugees brought to the office also required funds, but the lack of a budget to provide for refugees outside the UNHCR settlements created an impossible situation for staff and refugees alike.[9] For example, the hospital in Yei, already impoverished with shortages of everything, had no funds to feed refugees who were admitted as patients. Moreover, a family member had to stay with a patient, but there were no funds or food supplied for this purpose. An ad hoc arrangement was made with a local church to supply food from stores provided by UNHCR and intended for the transit centers, but there were still no funds to pay for special diets required by certain patients if they were to survive. Accounting had to be flexible – grave cloth to bury the dead sometimes came under the budget for "food in transit."

It would be difficult to devise a recruitment policy to select for qualities of character as well as for the skills required to work in such a situation, even if all the tasks mentioned were more equally divided among government and (more) agency staff. Dealing with individual cases demands mature judgment and the strength to maintain a consistent, firm – yet kind – approach. Many cases brought to the UNHCR office were, in terms of the scale of suffering, *not* legitimate, and some refugees became adept at manipulating personnel. Unfortunately,, the tendency was for staff members to base generalizations – and hence their approach to all cases – on their experience of refugees who had made nuisances of themselves. Considerable ill-feeling has been engendered as a result.

Just waiting to be seen could be a frustrating and humiliating experience. One young man arrived at the Yei office from the Kaya border. He was from a settlement in Eastern Equatoria where he had achieved the nearly impossible feat of gaining acceptance at a secondary school.[10] He had returned to the border to find his father and other family members whom he wanted to take back with him. He also hoped to persuade his father to sell some cattle to pay his school fees. He found the family, but all the cattle had been stolen by guerrillas. They detained him, tore up his letter of acceptance, and asked why he wanted to go to school when there was a war to be fought. They forced

him to train with them, but he eventually managed to escape. On arrival at Yei, he waited outside the UNHCR office for one entire week simply to be seen. Then, after seven days, the "solution" to his case was to provide him with transport money to return to Juba. Here he would again have to wait to ask for help to return to his settlement. As for his educational ambitions, he was told he would have to secure a new entrance paper from the school, and then return to Juba to apply for financial help from UNHCR.

It was possible to involve the waiting refugees by asking them to screen and sort out individual requests. The UNHCR Program Officer always informed them of the limits of the budget and explained why it was necessary to turn down a request. Unfortunately, not all staff members measured up to this standard and the inconsistencies in approach produced anxiety and insecurity among refugees and increased their tendency to use deceit and manipulation to attain objectives. For example, when there was no budget for the special milk for an infant whose mother had died (and many starved to death at their mother's dry breasts), a request for batteries to run a disco in a settlement appeared fairly bizarre. Knowing that the Program Officer was likely to turn down such a request, a group went to a temporary consultant who approved it. (Not surprisingly, this comparatively frivolous request began coming in from other quarters!) The power to make such arbitrary and discretionary decisions concerning the dispersal of funds in such a situation is a temptation.

Human frailty, compounded by physical exhaustion, makes the task exceedingly difficult and agency staff react to the magnitude of their work in a variety of ways. The best agencies make sure that their staff have had experience in Africa before employing them, but many do not. It is risky to send the uninitiated to work in a refugee emergency. The motive of wanting to "do good" is clearly insufficient to carry individuals through extreme conditions.[11]

Very few manage to keep a balance between dispassionate professionalism and compassion. Many people are afraid to come to terms with their emotional reactions and attempt to desensitize themselves with comments such as "Africans are used to this. They don't feel the same as we do when they lose a child."[12] Many refugee workers are acutely aware of the stark contrast between themselves – the well-paid bringers of "humanitarian" aid – and their clients – the poorest, most powerless people on earth. It is extremely difficult to face, as does happen, large numbers of people who are – through lack of food or medicine – on the verge of death, and be unable to relieve their suffering because of lack of supplies. But the internal defenses individuals develop to cope with this realization are too often counterproductive. A sense of humor, openness to criticism, and the willingness to admit mistakes to refugees as well as to colleagues are obviously crucial at all times.

Keeping a personal touch in the midst of the frenzied work schedule.

For a long time we lived in a room adjoining the office (which was shared by a driver, the storekeeper, and the cook). This meant that there was no escape from the demands of individuals day or night. A fence was built so that we could have our meals in relative privacy. One evening, during the meal, a woman pushed through the gate. After telling her to wait outside so that we could at least eat in peace, we discovered that she had come to report the death of her child at the hospital. The removal of a body, and its burial in Yei, requires the intervention of the office; local churches have no budgets to assist refugees either. She got the attention she requested.

Lorries bringing refugees from the border were often delayed. Arriving in Yei, unable to proceed to the settlement – usually because the vehicle had no headlights – the entire load of people, chickens, goats, and cattle would be off-loaded in the office compound. The people would have had no food or water throughout the entire trip. Sometimes it was possible to arrange for them to sleep in a school in the town, but usually they had to remain as best they could on the cement slab fronting the office or in the few tents pitched outside. The numbers were often as high as 100. Whatever cooked food was available in the local market would be hurriedly purchased and blankets (if available) were distributed. It was only after sanitary problems caused by these overnight stops became acute that efforts were made to establish a transit center outside the town – but this only meant that the problems were out of sight.

One night, a lorry driver arriving late from the border dropped three extremely ill children and their parents at the office compound. The hospital would not admit them so late.[13] One four-year-old was so hungry it tried to eat dry, unground *dura,* and it was so malnourished it died in the night. We faced the anguished father (who later also lost his wife and another child from malnutrition) in the morning – but not before eating our breakfast. Of course one had to eat to do one's work, and it would be unreasonable to expect agency staff to share their food with everyone who was standing around hungry. But it was exactly such contradictory situations – eating before seeing someone whose child has died of starvation – which confront relief workers all the time and which place them under enormous psychological stress. One young member of the staff told me that he felt like a bank teller standing in a cage with all the money. Outside the bars were his mother, his wife and his children – all starving – and he couldn't give the bank's money to them!

Handbooks for refugee workers always emphasize the importance of being sensitive to the culture of refugees. In Africa, a death places certain requirements on the family. One is to inform the relatives immediately; then they must visit the bereaved. After the incident just

described, the father wrote three letters to inform relatives still on the border, and it was quite easy for the Program Officer to deliver these on his next trip to Kaya.

On the other hand, it was often necessary to haul refugees off lorries when they wanted to travel to the border to fulfill family obligations. In such cases it was explained that the lorries had to be used first to save those who were waiting on the borders. Refugees are themselves aware of the need to maintain a disciplined approach within an assistance program. One, who was asked to screen requests from the settlements, wrote the following:

Arising from my study of the many letters from settlements to the UNHCR, I feel convinced that people from the camps expect and demand more than is within the limits of such organizations. Many of the demands are unreasonable and even ridiculous. . . . Why do the settled refugees have this tendency? The answer seems to be that refugees consider themselves as sick people admitted to hospitals, too weak to get up [and they in fact give up trying to get up]. They consider themselves like children who need and must be given constant nagging even to stop their own tears. This may be so, but there must be a limit.

It is possible, even within the frenzied work schedule of an emergency, to keep a personal touch. This encourages confidence that the program is actually humanitarian, and forces refugees to consider priorities even when these conflict with their own wishes. Refugees were always reminded that the program was designed to assist with the most pressing needs of the greatest numbers and urged to accept responsibility for their people as a whole, rather than simply pursuing their individual interests. This approach contrasted strikingly with that of many agency personnel who would refuse requests without explanation. However, even this approach in personal relations with refugees was essentially authoritarian and may not ultimately be conducive to true refugee participation. Moreover, the entire program is dominated by the distribution of material aid: all relationships center around its distribution, protecting it from theft or other "irregularities" of distribution, and most especially, with *getting* it. Since the organization of that distribution is controlled by outsiders, it is hardly surprising that relationships between agency personnel and refugees are distorted. How can the "hand" that feeds you tell you to feed yourself?

It is difficult in the face of acute suffering to keep a balance between dispassionate professionalism and compassion.

Reception Centers on the Border

The decision to accept help from the assistance program and move into a settlement is taken by the refugee himself. It is rare for host governments to move refugees forcibly into settlements. The refugee's experiences at the time he takes this decision are crucial in determining how he will respond from that moment on. While a refugee lives on the border, coping alone, he is keenly aware that it is the host government that has provided asylum and that it is the local officials and people who are making room for him. Whatever problems or positive experiences he has are seen in the context of his relationship with the Sudanese. Once a refugee moves under the umbrella of the internationally funded assistance program, perceptions change. Numerous signals remind him that he is now being cared for by others: he registers in the UNHCR reception center (above which the UNHCR flag may be flying); the sources of food supplies are clearly marked on the bags and tins; the vehicles he rides in similarly demonstrate just who is *now* in charge of his "salvation." Little wonder that some refugees refer to UNHCR as their "mother and father," although the use of the terminology is discouraged.[14]

Many refugees viewed the efforts of the program as managed by the Commission of Refugees Office (COR) as a plot to withhold international assistance. When there were shortages, they accused officials of diverting goods. All the problems arising between himself and the local population with which the refugee had formerly coped alone are now, at least potentially, mediated by expatriate organizations. Power struggles develop between agencies and government officials and these are recognized and manipulated by refugees. Admittedly, refugees are the most powerless party and it may well be argued that they require outside assistance to balance the struggle. But the resulting dependence runs directly counter to the stated goals of integrating refugees with the local population in Africa.

Throughout my stay in southern Sudan, the reception centers were mostly manned by refugees. They registered the people, assigned tents to them, and distributed food

rations on a daily or weekly basis. They also loaded the lorries that carried people to the settlements. As the numbers grew and the establishment of new sites was increasingly delayed, refugees were sent to transit centers which were hastily organized adjoining settlements. No medical services were available on the borders and, until September 1982, when they were no longer so urgently required, no supervised feeding programs for the severely malnourished. At Kaya, some medicines were made available to the refugee in charge and there was a local chemist where others could be purchased.

The foremen of the reception centers performed their tasks remarkably well under the circumstances. (The role of the settlement foreman is described in detail in Part III.) Among the incoming refugees there were always a few opportunists who took advantage of the availability of rations and had no intention of boarding a lorry bound for a settlement. For this reason, the Program Officer did not allow the allocation of any other material assistance at the reception centers and even blankets which had been given out were collected before the refugee left.[15] The problem of sorting out genuine cases was more difficult at reception centers in remote areas on the border. These centers were absolutely necessary as people arrived too weak to walk further. The following report from one foreman illustrates the problems:

I was now in Kerua since 5 July 1982 . . . . I found a number of 53 refugees. The day after my arrival 50 settled [i.e., self-settled] family heads emerged to get rations. This made me approach the subchief so that the aim of the transit camp is clearly explained . . . . The chief authorized me to address the market crowd . . . . I elaborated that nobody is forced to come to a refugee camp . . . the aim of the transit camp is to provide food, shelters . . . to the refugees who are to await for transport to the settlement. [Upon arrival] no one should expect to be mother-fed while in the camp. Tools like hoes and pangas are provided. They should diligently cultivate and practically utilise the term "double production," for the aid from UNHCR is limited to a period. So now I am receiving unsettled refugees and those coming directly from Uganda.

In this case, the refugee foreman took responsibility for explaining to the others what they could and could not expect in the settlements. Rather than leave this crucial function to chance, there should be a system of giving refugees, when they register, explicit details about the programs designed on their behalf, including information about their status in relation to the host government and agencies. If the content of such educational material were drawn up by experienced refugees and the responsibility for disseminating it were in their hands, unreasonble expectations might not develop.

"Protecting" Refugees

The protection of refugees is not only a highly sensitive issue, it is perhaps the most neglected area of attention in all refugee programs. Breaches of human rights involving refugees are not within the mandate of Amnesty International but are the responsibility of UNHCR.

As was noted in Part I, the Sudan has signed all the international agreements concerning the granting of asylum to refugees. The government has also passed legislation guaranteeing refugees the right to work, freedom of movement, and protection against theft of property. Refugees also have the same rights as Sudanese in respect to illegal detention, torture, and harassment (Regulation of Asylum Act, No. 45, 1974). All of these rights were breached at one time or another during the past year. Khartoum, the center of government, is a long way from the Ugandan border, and local officials and chiefs have never been told about the legal rights of refugees.[16] That the situation did not become even more serious as the number of Ugandans increased to one-third of the population of Western Equatoria was due more to the common decency of the Sudanese people than to any government or agency action.

One of the few perhaps indispensable functions an expatriate can perform is to be present in situations of potentially explosive tension. These are especially prone to occur at reception centers. If refugees are arrested at the border, as they sometimes are, it is necessary to investigate *why* they were arrested, which requires liaison with police, security, and military officials. The general lack of transport also means that locals are sometimes tempted to "hijack" the UNHCR lorries for personal use. Refugees often lose their property at these points along the border, either through outright theft or through subterfuge: the COR discovered a gang operating near Kassala who changed money as refugees entered. It is impossible to ex-

As is true of Uganda's population as a whole, most refugees in southern Sudan are Roman Catholic.

pect a refugee to cope with all the problems that naturally occur in such situations.

An international observer may at times mediate in conflicts between local authorities and refugees. It is unfortunate, but true, that his reports on incidents will be regarded as more credible than those of local officials or refugees. He can begin the process of educating all the parties concerned regarding their rights and duties. In such remote areas as border posts, his very presence can have the effect of stimulating professional competence and awareness among local officials. None of this can substitute however, for the establishment of mechanisms for communication and cooperation between host government officials and the agency responsible for protection, mechanisms involving local Sudanese and refugees in tackling the problems. The COR office in Khartoum has in the past taken the initiative in proposing improvements.

Beginning from the recognition of the obvious, that protection of refugees' rights in the Sudan is a question of enforcing the law, the COR pointed out that this cannot be done by an outside agency. Nor, for that matter, can even the COR enforce the law, although it does have influence. The present approach of monitoring breaches of the law is hardly satisfactory. As one official put it, "Those responsible for protection see their task as writing reports on violations. These are not kept within the organization, but through gossip, we always get to hear about them." The result is to increase the alienation between officials and the expatriate agency personnel. What is required is, first of all, a recognition of the difficulties of enforcing the law under the present conditions and a program of reform drawn up in the light of these realities. As in most poor countries there are not enough well-trained police, and even the department of the judiciary responsible for prosecuting offenders does not have officers everywhere in the country.

The COR proposed setting up a special body on which UNHCR, the COR, and other concerned departments would be represented to deal specifically with protection issues. The COR requested that UNHCR would begin by helping the government to publish the legislation concerning refugees' rights in local languages, in English, and in the languages of the refugees. (Arabic is the official language of the Sudan, but many others are also spoken.) Simple guidelines concerning the interpretation and application of the law were drawn up, and it was proposed that UNHCR also publish these for distribution along with copies of the laws. The proposal, which has been forwarded to Geneva, noted that the COR required the full-time services of a lawyer to advise and liaise with other departments.

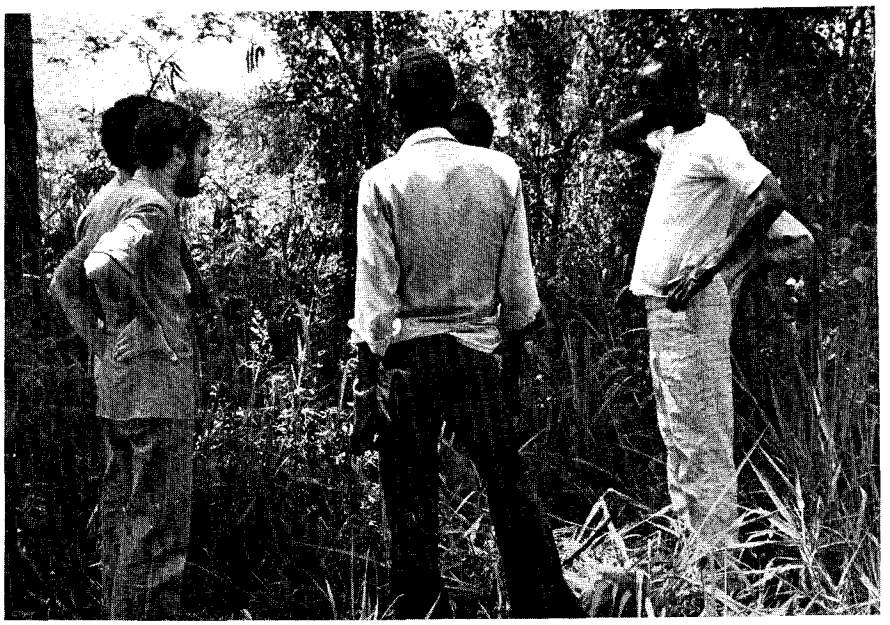
The need for general education of the Sudanese public was noted. People engaged in refugee assistance can mistakenly assume that the public is as aware as they of the problems. During the last year, UNHCR provided the Sudanese television station in Khartoum with an educational film and the new Commissioner for Refugees, following its showing, told me how many people remarked to him that they had no idea how many refugees were in the Sudan or of the work of his office. UNHCR produces excellent posters and other graphic materials designed to make people aware of the needs of refugees. The COR recommended that posters relating to protection issues be produced. Posters, it was argued, should always be designed for each host country. (One now used, a picture of Einstein with the caption indicating that he, too, was a refugee, is regarded as highly objectionable in Muslim Sudan.)

The Sudanese also point out that most UNHCR staff have insufficient knowledge of local realities to offer advice, as the following example illustrates. A refugee arrived from Gadaref informing the UNHCR office that his life would be in danger if he returned to the settlement. To dramatize his desperation, he slept in the graveyard in Khartoum — hardly a safe place. The office decided to send him to a settlement further south (Malakar) and informed the COR. But as a Sudanese official pointed out, there was no guarantee that the refugee would be safer there. He did not speak the language of those refugees and he was quite likely to be regarded as an agent of the Ethiopian government. He asked to interview the man, and to reassure them that he would not prejudice the outcome he did it in their presence. It emerged that the refugee only wanted money and, when it was offered, he began kissing the hand of the Sudanese. When reminded of his earlier fears, he continued his hand-kissing, assuring all present that "No, no, no, now there is no problem." On the other hand, dependence invites exploitation, and there is considerable evidence that female refugees may be especially vulnerable.[17]

Selecting Sites for Settlements

It is in the interest of everyone concerned to move refugees from reception points to settlements as quickly as possible: clean water and sanitary and medical services cannot be provided in the reception centers; large concentrations of refugees so near the border cause security problems; and the longer people remain in a state of suspension, unable to do anything for themselves, the greater their tendency toward apathy. Western Equatoria has large areas of uncultivated land, so on the surface it would appear to be comparatively easy to find settlement sites. But the best of paper schemes are confounded by local conditions: bad roads, lack of fuel, insufficient transport, lack of building supplies, and scarcity of adequate sources of water. It is also difficult to find a site on which the district officials, the chiefs, and the local people all agree. Delays became more serious in September and October and some refugees at transit centers began building and planting seeds they had brought from Uganda.

Two experiences with problems of site selection illustrate the worst and the best approaches to the problem. I arrived as Mopoko was being established. The site had been selected by two temporary UNHCR staff members and a lorry-load of refugees had spent the night there before the Program Officer arrived. As we approached, we met the refugees walking toward us and away from the site: they refused to remain there as there was no water and the place was infested with tsetse fly. We confirmed these complaints by examining the muddy trickle of water in the river under an impassable bridge. We also talked to a



Consulting refugees in the selection of a site.

local man who spoke English: he had been the chief but had been temporarily "deposed" while a case against him was being settled. Another old man, who did not speak English, was introduced as the acting chief. Since, reportedly, there were only about 1,000 people living in the chiefdom, which ran 25 miles in each direction, there was plenty of room. But the deposed chief insisted that the settlement be sited on the other side of the bridge. It became clear that his motive was to get UNHCR to build a new bridge.

The chiefdom had almost no amenities except for three boreholes dug during a time when someone from the chiefdom had been a Member of Parliament. The two chiefs were informed that a school and a clinic would be built to serve local Sudanese as well as the refugees, the school to be on a site of their own choosing. The deposed chief was promised that if local men helped to find a site, the need for a bridge would be considered later. By this time, another lorry-load of refugees had arrived. We drove up and down the trail which led to the main road to Yei trying to ascertain if there was enough agricultural land that was not "owned" by local people. We also examined the gravel on the road in an attempt to guess whether or not there were underground rocks which would interfere with the digging of shallow wells.[18] The local population was so dispersed that one saw more gravestones than houses along the road, but there was no time to trek into the bush to survey the land. Finally, a new place was agreed upon, but with the arrival of more refugees, there was not time to confirm the change of site with the Commissioner's office in Yei.

Then, in the midst of all these deliberations, wild bees attacked. Pandemonium reigned, with people running in every direction. Women and children had great difficulty climbing out of the lorries, and goats were left inside with no escape. Throughout the attack, which lasted more than an hour, they screamed in agony but no one could reach them. By the time the bees withdrew, all the people were at least another mile further down the road and no one was prepared to return to the chosen site. So the process of site selection began again. By nightfall, it was possible to set up the few tents available – most had to sleep in the open. In the now pouring rain, the first food rations arrived and were distributed. It was too late, however, for anyone to cook. The cereal *(dura)* had to be ground and beans take a long time to cook. Even if there had been dry wood, there were no tools to cut it, nor matches to light the fires.

The next day when UNHCR staff returned, another chief appeared. He explained that this site was not appropriate either as, when the rains began in earnest, the trail would be totally flooded and it would be impossible to bring supplies to the refugees. So the site had to be moved again, and with all speed as the bees launched another attack. Whatever confidence the refugees might still have had was further eroded when the "nurse" employed by the partner agency told the group that the local people had purposely set the bees on them to make them all go away!

Later, real problems developed between the refugees and the local people when the refugees began using trees and grass for building. The refugees complained that several men had turned up, each one claiming to be "the chief" and forbidding them to cut wood or grass on the grounds that they belonged to the people of his chiefdom. It was only then that it was discovered that the selected site intersected the boundaries of three different ethnic groups.

Another problem arose over the name of the settlement, Mopoko, which was actually the name of the very first place on the other side of the bridge. Since the budget for the settlement had already been forwarded to Geneva, no staff in the field could bear the bureaucratic chaos if another name was forwarded. On paper, then, the settlement remained Mopoko, but this was a source of constant irritation to the locals and of confusion in Yei River District.

Otogo, a new settlement situated some 15 miles from Yei, was founded under more auspicious conditions. Some local chiefs recognized there were advantages to having a settlement situated in their chiefdom, and one forwarded a request to the Commissioner's office that his area be considered. A meeting was organized and the chief pointed out possible places, and the Program Officer was able to get some feeling for the layout of the chiefdom: where the people lived, where the

rivers and streams ran, and just who had the authority to show him around the area. For the first time, a refugee coordination meeting was held, at which refugees and representatives of government departments concerned with health, education, and agriculture met representatives of aid agencies. It was proposed that all these interested parties should inspect the site, together with several refugees from other settlements, on the following Sunday. After ascertaining that the sub-chief was as positive as the chief about hosting a community of 3,000 strangers in his area and that he had been informed about the implications, the entire group – together with the sub-chief's son (who spoke English) and other residents – trekked about two miles into the bush. Everyone was able to ask questions based on previous experience of problems, the questions raised by the refugees being the most useful.[19] The spring that was the source of water for the locals was clearly insufficient, but we were assured that there were more springs deeper in the bush.

Returning to the sub-chief, we held a meeting with the local people who were just leaving the morning church service. The Program Officer explained the needs of the refugees as well as the problems consequent on such a massive and sudden increase in the population of the area. He also told them what the benefits would be. These included the building of a clinic on the roadside (formerly their nearest clinic was eight miles away) and some employment for locals who wanted to work clearing the road to the settlement site. Because this latter work would take a few days, he explained that UNHCR would need shelter and a store for supplies and asked if the church and school could be used for this purpose. The people hesitated. The Program Officer explained the dire health conditions of the refugees and the fact that he had no tents or blankets to give them. If the local people were unwilling to help, he said, this might indicate that the climate was not right for a settlement.

It emerged that the local people were aware of the sanitation needs of such a large group and knew that the existing latrines in the church school compound were insufficient. Once the residents had been assured that UNHCR would supply more pit latrines, the refugees were welcomed to spend as long as needed in this temporary site. The group agreed to name the settlement after a nearby mountain.

We were still doubtful about the water supply and about the quantity and quality of uncultivated land for the settlement, so it was agreed that the Ugandan employed by the agency responsible for agriculture in the settlements would return the next day to make a complete survey of the area and soil conditions so far as they could be ascertained from the vegetation and from local farmers' knowledge. The Program Officer and I also returned and trekked more extensively over the area. We hacked our way through the dense bush to the source of the spring water. It was decided that several shallow wells protected by a wooden platform would work temporarily until a drilling rig became available to obtain a more satisfactory supply of water.

A Sudanese foreman was "borrowed" from another settlement because he had experience in opening new settlements. He supervised the surveyors who marked the household plots and the local people employed to open a road. By the time the first new residents had arrived, Otogo had its own foreman, a man who had had a long career as a teacher, followed by ten years as a social worker in Uganda. Together with his family, he had survived two years on the border before deciding to come to a settlement. He had managed to obtain a hoe from a priest who distributed some to refugees living there. When Mopoko opened, there were no hoes available and at a meeting there he had emphasized that in order to survive one had to have a hoe. It was decided that he might be the right kind of person to inspire an entire community to work towards self-sufficiency, and under his leadership Otogo made remarkable progress.

Trying for a more reliable source of water.

Within a short time, most of the houses had been built and gardens planted. The refugees formed a Red Cross society to help the handicapped and one of their first activities was to help a local person. This went a long way toward nurturing the good relationships engendered by the careful manner in which the site had been selected. Despite a shocking number of deaths during the first few weeks the general spirit of this settlement was noticeably more optimistic than others.

The Lay-out of the Settlements

The aim was to establish settlements in areas where there was enough land for both houses and agriculture. Settlements were laid out in a grid pattern of blocks, each 125 meters square. These blocks were divided into 25 plots, each 25 meters square. The blocks were to be occupied by 24 families, each having a plot, with one plot left for communal use. Each plot had sufficient space for a house, a latrine, and a vegetable garden. People were told where their houses should be built and especially where the latrines were to be located. There were roads between the blocks and footpaths provided access to each plot.

The settlement plans also included space for administrative headquarters, usually located roughly in the center of the settlement. Land was reserved for schools, churches,

mosques, a market area, and playing fields. These amenities were to be located in such a way as to benefit not only the refugees but also the local population.

Surveyors were engaged to lay out the blocks and plots to which a refugee household would be assigned. Ideally, the refugees would pitch a tent and set to work immediately clearing the plot, building a house, and digging a latrine. A plot was considered completed if the refugees had a house, a latrine, a kitchen (or cooking shelter), a drying table (for drying cooking utensils), a bath shelter, and a refuse disposal pit. As the settlements rapidly became infested with rats, this list should have included a granary. When this was suggested to the refugees, however, they objected that they had no time to spare, that there were shortages of building materials, and that the rations were so small they hardly justified a storage place.

Readers who have experience in Africa will be aware that this layout is radically different from most indigenous settlements, and most of the literature on rural settlements warns against such "unnatural" grid patterns which cluster large communities of people together. Given a choice, refugees would be highly unlikely to accept such a plan, but no one, including the agency workers responsible for the plan, had a choice. As was observed earlier, the program was constrained by the demands of organizing the distribution of material aid. How else could a settlement be organized which allowed for the control of food distribution? So long as the refugees were dependent on material aid, it was impossible to give them freedom of choice.

Despite the attempts to organize the layout and administration of the settlement in a disciplined way, a myriad of irregularities occurred, refugees displaying a remarkable ingenuity in defeating all attempts to impose a system of equality. But it was the general view of those responsible for this plan that there were other, more important, advantages. In fact, the program was attempting what might be regarded as a bit of social engineering, described more fully in Part III. It is most unfortunate that, as far as I observed, no refugees were ever consulted concerning the overall objectives of the scheme, although these were repeatedly explained to as many as possible.

Agricultural Land

It was intended that agricultural land should be adjacent to the settlement, and that each household should have ten acres to farm. Unfortunately, the problems of African land tenure were not fully understood by the expatriate agency staff and all of the settlements founded before May 1982 had serious land problems.[20] As far as I could learn, the largest piece of land under cultivation by a refugee in a settlement was three acres. This refugee had arrived with money and had personally negotiated for his land with local officials. Yet, at Morobo (a place where there were said to be 8,000 self-settled refugees), it was reported that each household had ten acres allocated to them by the locals.

Sudanese law gives the government authority to allocate uncultivated land, but this contradicts the traditional system of land tenure. Land has a profound significance in Africa. Notwithstanding formal law, every inch of the continent is claimed by someone. (Modern law in Africa has been imposed upon local communities who are themselves, in relation to the state, often nearly as powerless as refugees.) Preparation, explanation, and negotiation with government offices and even with local chiefs are doomed to failure if they exclude personal negotiation with the individuals who hold these usufruct rights, although at a given moment it may be difficult to discover who claims such rights. Officials backed by the authority of the central government may override the individual's traditional rights in allocating land to refugees, but sooner or later, this will cause trouble. Often it is only through violence that the peasant reacts against the usurpation of his rights, and programs aimed at integrating refugees with the local community should not neglect to take this into account.

Local practices vary, but it is normal for Africans to hand over rights to unused land to strangers so long as their own rights are recognized and proper procedures are followed. These are usually ceremonial and may include the giving of an animal, drink, money or (usually) token amounts of each harvest, which symbolically maintain the relationship between the patron and client. Since refugees rarely have such resources, it is likely that ceremonial prescriptions will be waived or substituted, but the customs must be respected in at least some manner. These procedures take time and, in the midst of managing an emergency, with inadequate numbers of staff, none of the officials – expatriates or Sudanese – had time.

Ideally, these problems, which require time, manpower, and an understanding of the local customs, should be tackled by a delegation consisting of the refugees themselves and Sudanese representatives (including perhaps an anthropology student from the university) to meet local landowners and elders, once the official rights over an area of land had been agreed by the chief and government officials. The delegation would establish the refugees' lack of resources while bolstering the pride of their new hosts by acknowledging local customs and authority. This would do much to establish relationships on a sound basis from the start.

February 1983

Notes

1. Ugandan refugees living along the Sudanese border were subject to repeated incursions of the Ugandan army throughout the period of my stay in the Sudan.

2. This research methodology goes beyond participant-observation, the *sine qua non* of anthropology. It also goes beyond "applied anthropology" as it is usually conceived where the researcher analyzes a current program and advises the planners. Instead, one is consciously acting as an agent of social change among the members of the community one is studying and involving them in determining the types of data needed and how it may be obtained. Pearse and Stiefel (1979) have most recently written about the importance of this methodology but the pioneering study was conducted in a working-class community in Bristol. It was reported by John Spencer *et al* in *Stress and Release in an Urban Estate* (London 1964). (The full documentation of the Bristol Project can be found in the library of the University of Bristol.) Ideally, such action research would be conducted by a team who would continually review and examine the effects of their actions on the community, on themselves, and on one another. This approach is based on the recognition that all research is influenced by personal values and attempts to make these explicit at every step, including project formulation, data collection, and the interpretation of results. Moreover, as was found in the natural sciences, the nature of the world is too complex for the scientist, as Einstein put it, "to let himself be too much restricted . . . by the adherence to an epistemiological system" (quoted by A. Feyerabend, *Against Method* 1978:18). I believed that these methods were ideally suited to a refugee setting where, as in the housing estate in Bristol, the objective was to *promote* social change which would contribute to the development of a responsible community working toward self-sufficiency. I was fortunate to be able to work closely with the UNHCR Program Officer who understood (and shared) this approach, having used it among Turkish immigrants in the Netherlands.

Refugees themselves compiled the forms which have been left in the settlements for gathering statistical data on their progress toward self-sufficiency in food production, and it was at their suggestion that the question concerning religious affiliation was removed from the registration form.

Methods that involve the subjects of research, rather than treating them as objects or statistics, proved quite threatening to some expatriate agency staff who were accustomed to more conventional methods of pre-designed questionnaires put to a random sample. If refugees are allowed to participate, it is likely they will also criticize, and few agencies or agency staff are yet ready to subject themselves to painful self-examination.

3. Andrew Pearse and Matthias Stiefel, "Inquiry into participation - a research approach," UNRISD/79/C.14 Geneva: May 1979 (emphasis added).

4. I was informed by a UNHCR official that Geneva learned that food was not reaching refugees in Zaïre because of war conditions in Uganda not from their own field officer in Arua (whose report probably had to go through Kinshasa) but by reading the *International Herald Tribune.* Another agency worker confided that he had sent 23 memos to his headquarters but none had arrived. The rewards in some agency bureaucracies go to those who do not "make waves." When one agency staff member sent a report directly to his headquarters, he was informed by his superior in the country that he had made a very serious professional error by "hanging out their local dirty linen" in headquarters.

The media has a very important role to play in such situations, but refugees are usually located in remote areas. Political factors also play a great part in determining which emergency gets covered, as illustrated by reactions to Kampuchean refugees in Thailand or those refugees who crossed into Somalia from the Ogaden. It is unfortunate that journalists who do cover refugee emergencies concentrate so heavily on human suffering without exploring the underlying political issues.

5. For some time only a "storeman" was in charge at Yei. Such supplies as diesel, clothing, and food disappeared during the absence of supervision. One jerry-can of diesel could be sold for £S50.

6. The *Guardian,* February 25, 1983.

7. In addition to the expatriate staff recruited in Europe, many people just turn up and gain employment. Some I met had simply run out of money while traveling. With employment practices biased in favor of expatriates, almost any white face arriving on the scene has the chance of a job in an emergency. One itinerant Belgian was employed as logistics officer in Yei; he eventually absconded with the office motor bike! Another expatriate, with no appropriate training, was responsible at times for recruiting Ugandan medical staff. Since there was no Ugandan doctor who could vet qualifications, many errors were made. As one expatriate nurse sardonically commented: "If you painted the walls of Moyo hospital, you could get a job as a medical assistant in a refugee settlement." As medical staff were paid by the agency responsible, there was a strong incentive to lie about qualifications. There were a number of profession-level Ugandans who could have been consulted on the validity of most other qualifications of refugees, but no structure for this vetting process was established.

8. And they are not treated like professionals. The agricultural adviser, a Ugandan, has a degree from Makerere, and had been responsible for an entire district in Uganda. He has been able to use many of his former workers and was responsible for all settlements in Western Equatoria, which required traveling hundreds of miles. He was supplied with a motor bike, an extremely dangerous mode of travel, had no typewriter and no typist. Most seriously, he had no authority. He was paid £S100 (about which he never complained) but his obviously low status in the voluntary agency organization seriously militated against his acceptance by his peers and Sudanese officials. On one occasion when a minister asked to see representatives of all the voluntary agencies, the Ugandan agricultural adviser was turned away with the complaint that the European head of the organization (far away in Juba) should have attended.

9. One case illustrates the dilemma caused by having one's own money when facing refugees in need. A refugee hobbled to the office and lay on a hard bench outside the door, groaning in agony. One hand clutched his belly, the other held out a note from the hospital doctor which informed the office that the patient required emergency surgery for a hernia, but there was no fuel to sterilize the instruments. Could the office kindly supply the refugee with money to go to the market to buy charcoal and kerosene? Having no relatives around, the patient would have had to stagger to the market and then back to the hospital for his operation. Fortunately the Sudanese project manager was present with a vehicle (the hospital had none). The man survived but again had to return to ask for money for the special diet prescribed. Later, another refugee told me that his father had been waiting ten days for an "emergency" hernia operation (not all hernias are emergencies). I sent a note to the doctor (who I knew was extremely embarrased about the state of his hospital) asking if the problem was again money for fuel. He wrote back a very sad personal note saying that this time it was not only fuel; he even lacked post-operative bandages, but had disliked having to ask once again for such basic supplies.

Although UNHCR is mandated to support such institutions in refugee-affected areas, it was some time before anything was done for Yei hospital. Even then – an immediate supply of food, fuel, blankets, mattresses, and medicines – will have no lasting effect on services. What is required is a developmental program designed to upgrade the level of services to the whole area. But this requires approaching refugee assistance as part of regional economic development, a radical shift of focus.

10. The program for settlements does not normally include provision for secondary education. In southern Sudan there were limited funds for scholarships for which refugees could apply *after* they had gained entrance to a school. There were very few secondary schools open to refugees because of the dire shortage of places for Sudanese pupils. Moreover, a refugee had to find his *own* place in a school, which meant he would have to travel around the area. Since the limited public transport was not free, and refugees rarely have money, it was nearly impossible for a refugee to get acceptance into a school.

11. All symptoms of common neuroses can be found among them, including irritability, withdrawal, aggression, defensiveness, denial, depression, etc. Some

have their religious beliefs to sustain them. Many smoke marijuana when off-duty (although this is illegal in the Sudan). Most huddle together to complain about Africans, gossip about each other, and to drink. Children and marriages are subjected to strain. Very few appear to actually enjoy their work.

12. One of the most common mechanisms employed to avoid confronting the inadequacies of the programs was to appeal to the notion of "cultural" differences (that is, racialist explanations). When discussing the inadequacy of the health program, one agency doctor in Europe informed me that the Africans have lower and culturally-determined expectations for health care. In eastern Sudan, another doctor excused the lack of statistics on mortality on this basis: "These people do not believe in showing us the dying and the dead." To believe that Africans do not suffer as we do about death is the most ludicrous of all. It is amusing, however, to note that Africans hold the same stereotypes about Europeans (that is, white people). They believe that we don't care about our dead or suffer when someone dies. A simple glance over the differences in customs surrounding death is, for them, enough evidence that "we" are without emotion or feeling.

13. Even when someone was on duty to admit patients, the hospital lacked such basic equipment as pen and paper to fill out the forms required and sometimes the staff were afraid to admit a patient without following the rules. On one occasion, the Program Officer brought a dying refugee in during the night and had to rush about Yei looking for these items to enable the patient to be admitted.

14. In northern Sudan, where there are even more expatriates involved, some refugees have informed Sudanese officials that since they are now "under UNHCR," they were not willing to work toward self-sufficiency.

15. This was a health risk, although if blankets were laid in the sun for a time after use, it was not too serious. The problem was that there were never enough blankets. Often there would be only one for an entire family. Protecting the scarce supplies and trying to insure equitable distribution was simply impossible. On one occasion a temporary consultant made the mistake of sending tools to a transit center. Some refugees set to work to build shelters and plant seed, which would cause enormous problems when they had to be moved to the settlement; others, knowing the transit center was temporary, simply sold theirs.

16. Copies of the legislation itself were unavailable in Western Equatoria. Many officials had never heard of the law, nor did they understand the agreements made by the Sudan government with UNHCR. UNHCR staff have diplomatic status and vehicles carry "CD" plates. Very few police understood their significance, but this is not so surprising given that some local chiefs drove vehicles that carried the same license plates! During the time I was in Western Equatoria, there was only one three-day mission by the Khartoum-based UNHCR official responsible for protection, although the Program Officer sent regular reports of incidents.

17. Ingrid Palmer has described the extreme vulnerability of women and found many cases where sexual services were required to obtain assistance. See, "Women Refugees," unpublished seminar paper presented at the Crisis of Mass Exodus Seminar, University of Oxford, December 1982.

18. Ideally, site selection would be done by a team with appropriate training. Through experience, the Program Officer became quite good at assessing the potential for agriculture, underground wells, etc. However, sites chosen without his advice have nearly always developed problems. Once, he was assured by a less experienced staff member that there was sufficient water at one site. After he had moved 500 households to the area, the water ran out. When a drilling rig became available, several attempts were made to find water, but to no avail, and the entire population had to be moved again.

19. Listening to them we learned, for example, that there are times in the local agricultural cycle when "goats are released" – that is, they are allowed to graze freely. This had caused problems for refugees who had planted crops that were not harvested before this period. The importance of questions such as this and a host of other issues affecting farming would be known only to experienced refugee farmers.

20. One early settlement, Kala, had been sited in an area that was rocky and dry, against the advice of local authorities who knew it would be impossible to farm there. Unaided, some refugees had found more suitable land a long distance from the settlement, but after they had planted their crops the locals objected. This settlement had, by July 1982, received WFP food rations for two years, the time in which it had been anticipated that it should be self-sufficient. Officials arrived one day to inform the settlement that it was being cut off the distribution list. WFP is required to monitor progress toward self-sufficiency in food production, but it has no system for doing this and simply continues to supply for a limited time period.