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## UGANDAN REFUGEES IN THE SUDAN PART III: ADMINISTRATION IN PLANNED RURAL SETTLEMENTS

By Barbara Harrell-Bond

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**After reviewing the administration of refugee settlements, the author examines the "dependency syndrome" as it applies to Ugandan refugees. She suggests that such behavioral distortions are less the result of aid itself, or even the manner of its delivery, than a result of extended nutritional deprivation and other physiological factors.**

The program for Ugandan refugees in Western Equatoria, southern Sudan, attempts to foster self-sufficiency in planned rural settlements. Part I of this three-part series described the events that prompted the refugees' decision to undertake "the long journey" and seek assistance. Part II described the experience on arrival, and the physical challenges. The present Report concentrates on the administrative structure that is partly an attempt to organize assistance effectively, partly an effort to avoid or minimize the "dependency syndrome" associated with all aid programs. The last section comments briefly on some of the attitudinal and behavioral distortions that seem to emerge in such dire conditions of poverty, starvation, and physical insecurity.

The physical layout of the planned settlements ignored traditional patterns; equally, the administrative structure discouraged traditional forms of leadership. Both were conscious choices, based on the belief that colonial and neocolonial influences had already destroyed most of the traditional checks on the exercise of power at the grassroots level.<sup>1</sup> Planners also felt that refugees, as a consequence of exile,

had lost much of their identification with any form of social organization, and that their social relations were characterized by lack of trust. The aim of the program was to provide a rudimentary administration for day to day functioning and to assist refugees in developing a new basis for organizing viable communities. It is much too early to judge the effectiveness of this approach.

Ideally, the refugees were to be involved in every aspect of the management of their communities. Each block, both a physical and administrative unit, was occupied by 24 households. No effort was made either to promote or discourage settlement by ethnic groupings, though the fact that a sizable number of refugees from a single group might cross the border together meant that some settlements were predominantly of one or another linguistic group. Foremen at the reception points often sent the most seriously ill cases to the settlement first, which meant that the first blocks were populated by the most vulnerable. As far as I could observe, this was the only systematic influence on what was otherwise a fairly random distribution. Refugees themselves determined the composition of each household.<sup>2</sup>

Each block was to elect a chairman and an assistant; block communities were encouraged to organize themselves by electing people responsible for health, education, and productivity. Out of the group of block leaders, a chairman, vice-chairman, and secretary for the entire community would be elected. Thus, every person who served in an official capacity in the settlement would also be directly responsible to a block community constituency.

The only exception was the settlement foreman.

When the first settlements were established, however, ad hoc arrangements had to be made. A person who "looked" responsible was directed to serve as a block leader until elections. Too often the result was disastrous. By the time Otogo was founded, the foreman was advised to hold temporary elections for block leaders immediately, so that the community would understand their relationship to the leader when irregularities occurred in the distribution of food.<sup>3</sup> Guidelines for elections were circulated, encouraging residents to think about the qualities of leadership required and to choose individuals who were willing to serve their communities with commitment and equity, and most important, without financial or material reward. Once the settlement had been established for a period of time, fresh elections were to be held. The terms of office of leaders were not fixed; refugees may in time propose constitutions for the various settlements.

In addition to the settlement foreman, a storeman, surveyors, and watchmen were employed in the initial period. With the exception of the foreman, these paid positions were to be phased out as refugees assumed more responsibilities. The settlements also had medical and agricultural staff appointed and supported by partner agencies. In some settlements, the Sudan Council of Churches (not officially a partner agency) had voluntarily employed two social workers. Because they lacked the budget to extend this service, in the newer settlement their work was done by refugee volunteers. Once the residential area had been established, the work of surveying and assigning agricultural land was to be done by the agricultural staff person in cooperation with the productivity committees from each block.

The administrative structure was designed to provide a direct channel of communication with each refugee family. Records (household census forms) were to be kept by the foreman and block leaders were expected to record all distributions in their block. The store and all files were to be open to all refugees during specified office hours for their examination to insure equitable

distribution. Registration of births and deaths in principle provides each settlement an accurate day-to-day record of its population. During my stay, however, no health, mortality, or birth records were maintained. Thus the legal status of children born during their parents' exile is unclear, yet most African countries require a birth certificate for school entrance.

The plot and block system provided each refugee with an "address" which encouraged them to identify with their community. There were numerous efforts to encourage a sense of mutual responsibility at the block level — for example by building houses for the many who were unable to do so for themselves — and counter the tendency of refugees to reject social responsibilities. On one occasion I witnessed, when a tiny infant was orphaned, the Program Officer was asked to take it to an orphanage. The community was informed — in no uncertain terms — that the child was their responsibility. Had Ugandans never heard of the "extended family"? "If there are no relatives to take care of this child, *create* a family for it!" While many rose to such challenges, it was an uphill struggle. Once, I visited a block where a woman had just delivered and was hemorrhaging severely. The father of the infant was roaring drunk. I asked the people in the block if the medical assistant had been called. No one took the responsibility. After I left, she died, still untreated. Later, the people were reminded that they all — not just the father — shared responsibility for the death, as no one had been willing to intervene.

### **The Foreman**

The role of the foreman is crucial. In the initial stages his task is particularly demanding. He must welcome new arrivals and orient them to the fact that they are expected to work from the outset toward self-sufficiency. He must impress upon them that the assistance they receive is short-term.

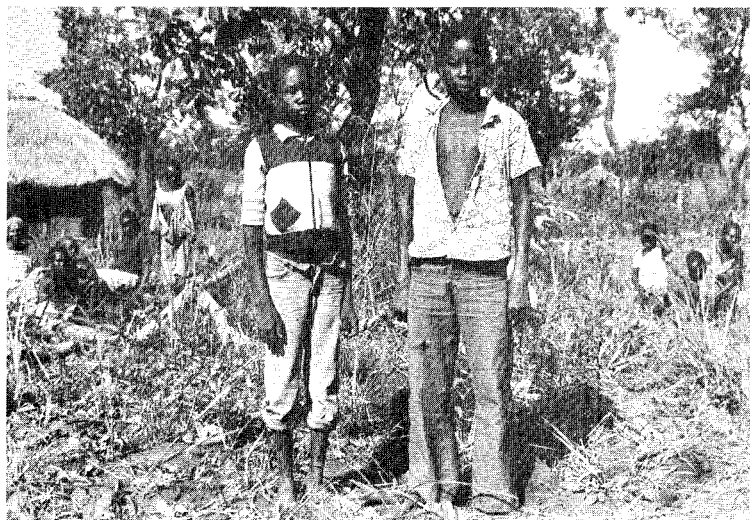
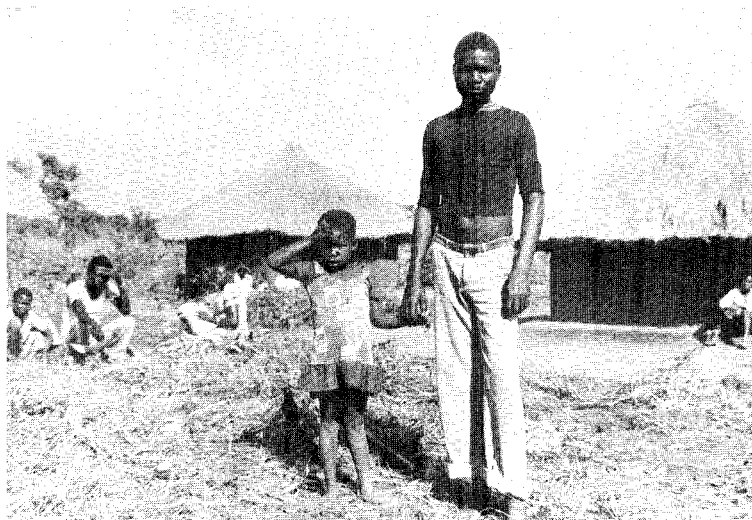
The foreman has to supervise the distribution of material aid, is responsible for the supervision of the surveyors and other paid staff, and is accountable for all the money and materials allocated to the settlement. He also supervises elections after registering and assigning families to their plots.

The foreman is the overall coordinator of development activities and must report to the government and UNHCR on all aspects of settlement life. Since UNHCR has overall responsibility for the settlements, the foreman must also monitor the work of other agencies active in his jurisdiction. In Western Equatoria, one partner agency had responsibility for health, another for agriculture, building of permanent structures (schools, clinics, offices, community center and store), and for organizing money-making projects.<sup>4</sup> The foreman's day-to-day review is intended to insure that projects are actually implemented during the funding period.<sup>5</sup>

Developing leadership skills is another of the foreman's challenges. Self-sufficiency requires both physical resources and a social structure that promotes community participation. Establishing health committees in each block, for example, was intended to make refugees more conscious of what they could do to manage some of their own health problems. The health committee not only provides an avenue for preventative health education but also provides feedback to the foreman on the agency-managed medical program.

Setting up vegetable nurseries in each block in one settlement represented another attempt to create a sense of belonging to an established community. This activity encouraged people to become acquainted with one another and to share the responsibility for the block's well-being. The importance of this identification is reflected in the naming of different sections of a settlement and in the many songs expressing the importance of belonging to the new community. The foreman is also expected to initiate integrating activities such as social events and special committees to solve local-level problems.

One of the most important aspects of the foreman's assignment is that of establishing good relations between the refugees and the local Sudanese population. This requires regular meetings with local authorities, encouraging refugees to participate in local events and insuring that both refugees and local people are represented on committees such as that for school management.



*Some examples of "families" broken by war, the flight from Uganda, and by death in the settlements. These families live in Goli settlement.*



*Children at a general meeting at Limuru settlement.*

Ideally, this administrative system would create a leadership structure with sufficient checks and balances to discourage corruption and to develop awareness and participation. This approach also supports the overall policy of the government in southern Sudan, which encourages popular participation and self-help.

Yet, there was no system of recruitment and training. The first foremen were recruited ad hoc and more than one had to be sacked for mismanaging funds or for alcoholism. The first settlements had been run by committees of refugees; while generally unsatisfactory, this gave an opportunity for those with leadership ability to emerge.

The problem of selecting leaders must be seen from the economic perspective as well. Legally, refugees in the Sudan have a right to be employed. In southern Sudan, however, there are very few salaried positions available for anyone, even a Sudanese. Thus opportunities for employment also implied competition between refugees and local Sudanese. Some officials also argued against giving refugees so much authority in the settlement, fearing a loss of control that would jeopardize good relations with the local population. The UNHCR Program Officer tried to keep a balance. In the long run, moreover, personal qualities counted for more than nationality in the role of foreman. In

addition, many of the Sudanese in the region had themselves been refugees during the Sudan's long civil war, so they had firsthand experience and understanding of the problems.<sup>4</sup>

In the absence of a training scheme for the foremen, the Program Officer instituted monthly meetings of all foremen and settlement chairmen. Held in Yei, the meetings began early on Saturday and, during the course of the day, participants could discuss problems among themselves and get instructions from administrative headquarters, learning from their mistakes. Government representatives were also encouraged to attend these meetings. The voluntary agencies were asked to report to the meetings on the progress of their programmes, and to hear reports from the settlements on how their workers were performing.<sup>7</sup> Efforts were made to create a climate of cooperation and teamwork and to demonstrate to the expatriate workers in particular the importance of collaboration and consultation with refugees.<sup>8</sup> On Sunday, the participants visited at least one other settlement to observe its progress, an especially effective way of creating a sense of pride in accomplishments. (It also had the unplanned effect of creating a certain degree of competition between settlements.)

The foremen were also required to write monthly reports, a demanding exercise beyond the skills of most. The report was designed in such a way as to require the foremen to involve other people in its preparation, and incomplete reports were sent back to be rewritten.

The position of the foremen was not secure. Even the UNHCR budget for the settlements made no provision for it, and funds to pay them were borrowed from allocations for positions the Program Officer believed were better performed by volunteer labor. Foremen were informed of the precarious nature of their relatively well-paid jobs and challenged to prove their worth to the program.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Impact of Aid**

Too often, the overall impact of financial and material aid impedes rather than fosters the attainment of self-sufficiency and the integration of refugees with the local population, a dilemma that has received little attention. Even a cursory examination of agency budgets reveals striking imbalances. For example, a large amount of money is always allocated for the transport of food to the settlements, while far too little is available to buy the seeds and tools necessary for independent food production. Equally important is the timing. As the Ugandan agricultural adviser was always emphasizing: "If you give seeds when there is no food, people eat the seeds. If you give seeds when there are no hoes [and there are never enough], people will eat the seeds. If you give hoes at the wrong time or without seeds, people will sell the hoes to buy food."

Even more complex is the effect of paying refugees salaries. The budgets for settlements included money to be paid as "incentives" for such work as digging latrines, building houses, and clearing roads and paths. Such work could be regarded as a normal part of taking care of oneself, but it is believed that people will work more quickly if they are paid. Despite such incentives, the rate of building was never fast enough to keep up with demand: building materials were often in short supply, or there was no lorry to transport them to the settlement. Moreover, some refugees were simply incapable of working faster,



while others — the handicapped, children, etc. — could do nothing at all. There were times when the Program Officer used force to remove tents, desperately needed for new arrivals, hoping the word would spread and people would respond.<sup>10</sup>

Not only does this incentive scheme fail to achieve the desired results, it actually discourages self-sufficiency. The UNHCR is seen as a source of money and refugees will demand to be paid for all work, such as off-loading their own food, assisting in the supplementary feeding of their own children, and once even for assisting the Program Officer to get his vehicle out of the mud!

Moreover, there were vast differences in the policies of various agencies. At Limbe settlement, for example, when social workers were trying to get a self-help community center built, someone came along and said that it was a waste of time because soon the agency responsible for building permanent buildings would come and pay them for building it.

Problems also arose out of the difference between the educational policies of the agencies and those of the Sudan. The latter encouraged local people to build their own schools and the government would then pay the teachers. But many Sudanese schools were taught by "volunteers," some earning as little as £5 per month, compared with the £50 earned by teachers in the settlement. Sudanese teachers sometimes had classes of as many as 100 pupils and there were cases of pupils farming for their teachers. The policy was thus creating serious imbalances and was, in fact, working against integration. Moreover, it is clear that the Sudan government will not be able to foot the wage-bill for all the settlements in Southern Sudan (33 at last reporting) when it takes over from UNHCR as is planned.

The UNHCR budget for teachers was clearly insufficient for the number of children. This caused many problems. Nepotism, not merit, was too often the basis for getting a job as a teacher, until Sudan's Department of Education began vetting qualifications. Other problems developed as a result of the creation of a few relatively "fat

cats" among a community with no money. One refugee described this problem:

*... salaries in the camps has brought a great evil ... the teachers themselves are developing a kind of superiority over the rest of the community. That they have money has caused them to misbehave. I remember before Kala was first given a regular supply of food. The teachers had food and they felt good although the other people in their community were desperately looking for food or other means to survive [mainly by working for local Sudanese]. And what happened? There was an occasion when UNHCR brought some food to the camp to share. Though other refugees were not employed and had no means to get regular money, a few had a little. But one teacher came and wanted to buy the whole sack of cassava because he had enough money. He knew the food supply was to be kept in stock, but he had money so he wanted the whole sack so that his own family would not starve. He forgot that others who came with their little money wanted their own share. [Food is not to be sold in the settlements in any case.] The consequence was that refugees standing around started to challenge that teacher. It was almost to the point of fighting and it might have been bad. If people who were sensible hadn't taken the initiative, he was going to be beaten. Another teacher spent his salary on drink. The wife came and complained that he spent most of his time teaching and when money came, he mismanaged it ... it should have been used on the field. The man turned against the woman, kicked her, and dislocated her hip. Thinking ... he has the sole right to his money. These are just individual examples, but its root is first of all in the mentality of the individual and also in the evil of money given as salary.*

Another refugee saw the longer-term impact of this method of financial assistance:

*... we should all do the work voluntarily. In fact this should apply to all sectors of our social development and health centers. Because, in the long run ... if the UNHCR will not [be here] to pay and we don't get a penny to pay these people, where shall we be? Who will take up the*

*work? Who will pay the teachers? ... It will also apply to the medical system. Now he is being paid, but when UNHCR will not be able to pay these men, we are going to have to pay ... Are we going to allow this sort of way, this system. No. To me I am thinking that it would be good for all the settlements to cut down this sort of payment so that all the work is done voluntarily. I would say that aid should not be given directly as payments to individuals, but as in the case of teachers, to the education committee so that it can give each teacher £S10 or £S20 a month. Then the money will last longer and by then we should be fully self-sufficient and be able to pay them from our own pocket.*

This discussion went on to consider the need for the community to organize itself to farm for the teachers who could not grow their own food while teaching. An example was given of a laboratory technician who was "stopped from his work because of his professional career in the past" [he was a guerilla fighter].

*... this guy could look in a microscope to see the worms inside you. The medical assistant, who has no time to see that [and was usually untrained] could then prescribe the right drug for you. This man was just sitting there, but because he was now not paid a salary, he did not make the tests. He didn't refuse, he was stopped by the government or something ... The community came together and said "What shall we do for this man?" They agreed to pay him an extra amount of their food rations if he sat in the lab. The community tried to do something, and the last time I was in Kala, he was helping to see what the parasites were.*

Another refugee spoke:

*Well, again, taking reference to our mother country, Uganda, I remember I have learned one very good lesson from those who are fighting in the bush ... They were not paid either in money or in cattle. However, in cases of emergency, they demanded something. I am sure that if that method was used in the camps, it would be very good. The bush operation in Uganda was on a voluntary basis and it worked perfectly.*

After a time, the education policy in the settlement was changed. Discussions such as that reported above were held, and in some of the newer settlements the budget for teachers' salaries was placed in the hands of education committees as an experiment. Twenty percent of this money was allocated for the continual upgrading of the school, and the remainder divided among the teachers — not a salary as such, but as a means of enabling them to pay people to cultivate their fields while they taught. This allowed for the employment of a sufficient number of teachers to deal with all the children.

Similarly, as noted earlier, budget for administrative positions filled by volunteers was used to pay the foreman and to provide a fund for community use. Expenditures of this fund were to be reported to the refugee community as a whole, as well as to the UNHCR office. The philosophy behind this approach was to provide the refugees with the opportunity to prepare themselves

realistically for a future which will not include the money now available from outside the Sudan.

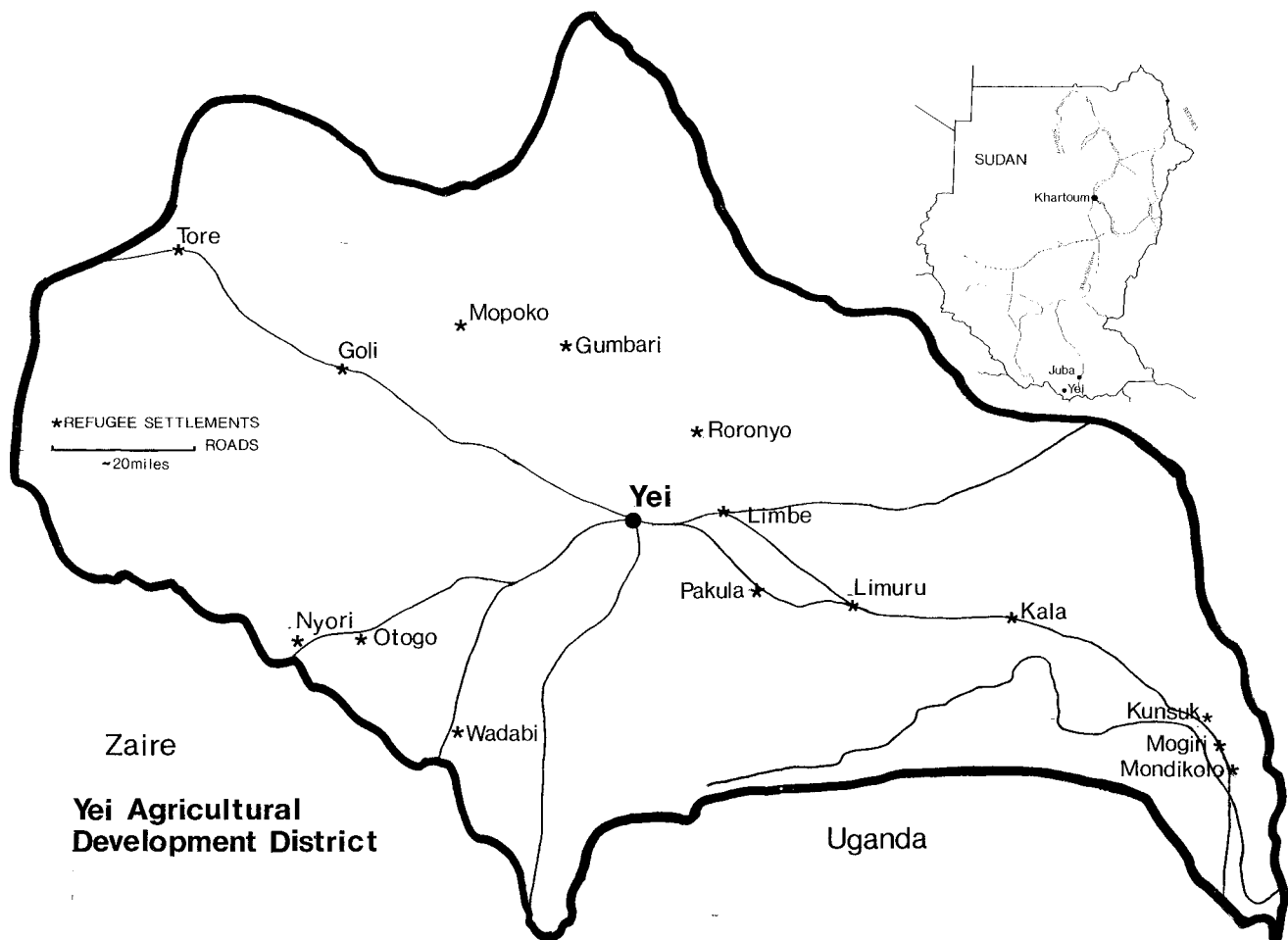
Following on from this, efforts were made to plan and situate services provided to the settlement so they would also serve the local people. This was a fundamental reason for the spread of settlements throughout the Yei River District, a policy which had been insisted upon by the local authorities. While refugees are often irritated by the fact that "their" medical facility or school is located some distance from their residence, it gave the opportunity to push them toward an appreciation of the ultimate goal of integration.

#### Information

There is an unfortunate but understandable tendency for people who work with refugees to treat them as objects and statistics. In the rush of work it is too easy to forget that refugees are usually suffering from shock, fear, and disorientation. Many project all their fears from past experiences of atrocities and

epidemics into settlement life. Through their experiences of exile, many come to regard all authority, including the UNHCR, as oppressive and threatening. As described in Part I, a number of refugees managed to survive for long periods independently of any assistance. Once they have been driven by hunger and disease to accept settlement life, however, their attitudes undergo a remarkable change. Suddenly they expect all their needs to be met by others and express unrealistic expectations. This so-called "dependency syndrome" could be avoided or at least reduced if more care were taken to brief refugees fully from the outset.

A stark example of this change in behavior occurred in August when a man who had led the community of cattle-keepers at Mondikilo — a settlement near Kajo-Kaji — was employed as the foreman of a new settlement nearby. Mondikilo had been selected as a site by a former UNHCR head of sub-office, together with the local executive officer,



because, although it was "too near" the border,<sup>11</sup> lower incidence of tsetse fly gave cattle a better chance of survival than they would have had further inland. Initially, these refugees received rations, but later a new head of sub-office stopped supplies to the settlement because of its location. Although the people suffered greatly, they managed to survive and organized themselves into a cohesive community. They even built an impressive dry stone wall building for a clinic and office, and started cooperative farming. The first time I visited them, the group — although complaining bitterly about their exclusion from the assistance program — was clearly proud of its accomplishments.

### Food for Thought

Nearly every discussion of refugees (including this one) makes explicit reference to the refugees' psychological state, especially at the outset of an emergency. It is usually assumed that in the early stages, refugees are generally not only physically too weak to take responsibility for themselves but mentally too disoriented as well. Whether this assumption is made explicit or not, most relief workers work on this basis. At the outset of an emergency, refugees are treated like patients being admitted to hospital; it is little wonder that they continue to behave like patients later on.

It is easy to employ psychological theories to explain the behavior of refugees who act abnormally.<sup>12</sup> But such explanations divert attention away from analysis of the underlying causes of the behavior.

Some years ago, Colin Turnbull published a study of the Ik, a community of hunters and gatherers living in the mountains bordering Kenya, Uganda, and the Sudan.<sup>13</sup> Turnbull is most famous for his studies of pygmies, the "forest people," and if any criticism could be made of his earlier work, it would perhaps be that he overly romanticized their society. His study of the "mountain people" shocked the anthropological world.

Hunters and gatherers require large areas of land and the Ik had lost most of theirs during the colonial period as a result of what many now believe is the false assumption that animals are better protected in

game reserves in which human habitation is forbidden. The Ik were forced to subsist mainly on agriculture, even though cultivation was new to them and the technology available primitive in the extreme. Then drought gradually produced famine conditions in the Karamojah. When Turnbull first arrived, he did not fully appreciate that an entire community was beginning literally to starve to death under his eyes. He warns his readers in the preface:

*In what follows there will be much to shock, and the reader will be tempted to say, "how primitive . . . how savage . . . how disgusting" and, above all, "how inhuman". In living the experience I said all those things over and over again. The first judgements are typical of the kind of ethno- and ego-centricism from which we can never quite escape, however much we try, and are little more than reaffirmation of standards that are different in circumstances that are different. But the latter judgement, "how inhuman", is of a different order, and supposes that there are certain standards common to all humanity itself, from which the people described in this book seem to depart in a most drastic manner. In living the experience, however, and perhaps in reading it, one finds that it is oneself one is looking at and questioning; it is a voyage in quest of the basic human and a discovery of his potential for inhumanity, a potential that lies within us all. Many of us are unlikely to admit readily that we can sink as low as the Ik, but many of us do, and with far less cause. (p.11)*

The family was the first institution to collapse. While they still "insisted" on living in villages,

*. . . the villages have nothing that could be called a truly social structure, for they encompass no social life, and despite the fact that members of a village mistrust and fear each other more than any others, in direct proportion to their proximity and completely without regard to family and kinship. The mistrust begins even within the compound, between a man and his wife, and between each of them and their children. (p.133)*

The publication of Turnbull's book created a storm as the subsequent debate in *Current Anthropology*

showed.<sup>14</sup> His indignant colleagues accused him of irresponsibility, falsification of data, unbridled subjectivity, exaggeration, excess emotionalism, incompetence, and lying. But the guns fell strangely silent when James Knight's "On the Ik and Anthropology: A Further Note" appeared in the same journal. In quiet academic language, he pointed out a simple truth:

*The discussants appear to minimize or disregard . . . the specific role of starvation in generating the behavior and conditions observed among the Ik. A knowledge of the effects of hunger is essential if the Ik and the issues their society has raised are to be understood and placed in perspective. Both Turnbull and his reviewers appear to recognize that starvation was the primary stress under which Icen society was transformed . . . but they seem to consider starvation or famine as a generalized, simply disruptive stress. Instead, its effects are highly specific . . .<sup>15</sup>*

He went on to explain that human starvation is actually most often "semi-starvation" as food intake is usually reduced rather than completely stopped. He cites a standard reference for the study of the effects of starvation, a work assembled over a quarter of a century ago by Keys et al.<sup>16</sup> These authors exhaustively examined the psychological and physiological effects of "natural semi-starvation" and reported the results of the "Minnesota Experiment" which was a well-controlled experiment undertaken during World War II in order to obtain data for the planning of relief operations in Europe. The effects observed in both natural and experimental situations were similar. But, as Knight goes on,

*The effects of natural starvation generally tended to be more severe and widely variable, however, since the experimental group was subjected to calorie reduction alone, while exacerbating factors such as dietary deficiencies and societal disruptions are generally present in a natural family [as they are in refugee situations].*

The characteristic set of behavioral changes observed in both the natural and experimental conditions included: depression, irritability, nervousness and general emotional

instability, social withdrawal, narrowing of interests, obliteration of sex drive, loss of concentration, apathy, vindictiveness, reduction of humor to sarcasm, neglect of personal hygiene, "loss of concern with the niceties," and an overriding concern with food and eating.

*Behaviour habits acquired during periods of food deprivation are abandoned or modified with notable reluctance. Again, these changes are induced solely by dietary restriction in an otherwise undisrupted and unremarkable environment. "The behavioral changes . . . were universal among the [experimental] subjects; hence they may be considered as 'normal' reactions under the given circumstances although they deviated markedly from the pre-starvation pattern of behavior . . ." The differences between Turnbull's earlier description of the Ik . . . and that in The Mountain People seem to be a clear function of these characteristic human reactions to prolonged semistarvation.*

Earlier, Turnbull had referred to the Ik as "fun-loving people" who "thrive on work" and love to help one another and are a great family people." Knight states that their transformation into a people,

*. . . as unfriendly, uncharitable, inhospitable, and generally mean as any people can be . . . indifferent to their own plight and that of others, so preoccupied with food that it became their very word for "goodness", was clearly a highly predictable result of famine. In view of the frequency of patterns of flight and societal collapse documented by Keys et al. and the more recent disruptions generated by famine observed in West Africa, the most remarkable aspect of the Ik may well be the cohesiveness of their social network under such stress . . . the Ik are clearly not the enigma Turnbull considers them.*

The close parallels between the behavior of the Ik, as described by Turnbull and Knight, and that of the Ugandan refugees deserves a fuller exploration than is possible within this Report. I am reminded of a talk with Alison Umar, a Ugandan doctor visiting Yei. We walked the five kilometers from Yei to the transit center together, to see about 300 fresh arrivals sitting there amidst their own filth and rubble. The

foreman reported that several dangerous snakes had come into the clearing. I advised him to hand out pangas and get the people to clear away the bush from the perimeters. No one moved. I shrugged and said something to the effect that "OK, it won't be my funeral." As we walked back toward the town, I asked Dr. Umar how one could explain such incredible apathy. "They have been living for so long hiding in the bush inside Uganda in terror of being found by the soldiers," he quietly replied. "They have had only cassava to eat for over the past two years. They have seen the most inhuman atrocities committed before their eyes. They have watched their relatives die from diseases never known before. This has become normal. They cannot remember another way." Knight makes a similar observation:

*Significantly, in the present context of the debate over the Ik these behaviors do not quickly disappear after relief from food deprivation, but persist for several months even if an unlimited good diet is available.*

The stark fact is that refugees in Western Equatoria (and in many other areas) also receive an inadequate diet under the assistance program. The World Food Programme food basket was supposed to contain 2,000 calories as a daily ration. This ration was distributed equally, to adults and children alike, so that it could be argued that there would be "enough" food for those whose requirements were greater. Leaving aside the question of whether or not this is an adequate amount of calories for people who are already suffering from some degree of food deprivation and who are expected to undertake strenuous physical work, the diet was seriously imbalanced nutritionally. The food basket was supposed to contain cereal, beans, edible fat, and powdered milk.<sup>18</sup> It contained no salt, spices, and certainly no sugar. Salt was purchased irregularly from the UNHCR budget. No vegetables or meat were provided. In many settings, it could be expected that people would be able to supplement their diets from the environment. Often there are wild plants to provide extra nutrients. But in Western Equatoria, local edi-



*Children happily eating termites they found in some dry wood.*



ble plants were either unfamiliar to the Ugandans or were in short supply. Leaves from cassava are a source of nutrients, but in southern Sudan (apparently unlike Uganda) these were not regarded as "public property" and refugees often got into trouble when they tried to gather them without payment. Termites are a food source and occasionally one saw children happily eating them from a nest found in some piece of dead wood, although Ugandan adults claimed they were not accustomed to eating them. There was a local tree, called "lulu," from which oil could be obtained.<sup>19</sup> There was some game, but refugees were certainly not allowed to use guns and they didn't have the necessary materials to hunt with snares (most Ugandans had lost these hunting skills anyway). Moreover, some refugee settlements were in, or bordered, "game reserves," and hunting might have incurred penalties. Refugees were able to work for local people, but for abysmally low wages, often paid not in cash but in cassava, on its own an unnutritious food.

Scant attention has been paid to the consequences of dietary deficiencies among African refugees. Discussing the lack of therapeutic feeding programs for the severely malnourished children in the settlements, one European doctor pointed out that no research has been conducted on children whose lives have been saved through these programs where they do exist. The relation between inadequate food intake (protein) in the early years of a child's development and mental retardation has been well established. As he put it, "We don't know if we are doing them any favour by saving their lives!"

Although the handbooks on refugee assistance advocate that a nutritionist be available to advise on the diets of refugees being cared for in an emergency, there was no nutritionist in Western Equatoria until September 1982 and the person who arrived was not involved in the settlement program. The Inspector of Health for the Yei River District drew my attention to the fact that malnourished people can be killed by improper feeding. Visiting Mopoko in July, he had found a large proportion of the adults as well as many children displaying signs of severe

malnutrition.<sup>20</sup> They were receiving a heavy diet which could cause serious complications. Their feeding should be supervised, but the assistance program there did not afford such luxuries.

Throughout the period I was there, WFP was constantly running out of supplies of one item or another in the "food basket." Other agencies sometimes were able to help out, but it took time to coordinate. When WFP ran out of beans, purchases were made in the market at the risk of inflating local prices. Supplies of edible fat had run out by October. Having failed to anticipate the influx of new refugees, appeals were made to other sources and the Norwegian government sent several tons of fish powder. As an experienced nurse warned, however, if refugees were not instructed in the careful preparation of this food, it would be inedible because of the strong flavor and smell. (Besides, some refugees knew that fish powder is used as a protein supplement for animal feed in Europe.) In December, the situation was already extremely serious, as the following excerpts from a letter dated December 9, 1982 indicate:

*I have been tied down preparing reports on Goli, Pakula, Kunsuk, Otogo, Mopoko, Roronyo, and Limuru, as WFP is hurrying to move the development ahead [meaning to cut to half ration]. Yet they had absolutely no time to approach self-sufficiency. If my reports don't convince them, I will send you details of the progress, if any, on the above settlements. I came from Pakula 8 December 1982 and they had an absolutely empty food store for two weeks. The settlement is virtually empty as settlers are in search of food. I hope a food weapon will not be used to eject back Ugandans.*

By January the weekly rations had fallen in one settlement, where it was actually measured, to one kilogram of dura and one-half cup of fishpowder per week.

It has already been noted that only 10 percent of all food aid is designated for emergencies where it may mean the difference between life and death. At a recent seminar on food aid, held in London, the audience was informed that for WFP emergency food supplies, refugees are *not* a high priority. Given this fact and the enormous difficulties

and expense involved in transporting food supplies in Africa (in southern Sudan, for example, most must come by road from Kenya), it is hardly surprising that relief food is insufficient.

Programs that are aimed at encouraging refugee participation in reaching self-sufficiency in all respects require their whole-hearted cooperation. The established correlation between social behavior and food deprivation suggests that more attention should be placed on insuring that already weak and undernourished people have an adequate diet. While searching for clever techniques to engage refugees in the process which will lead to their self-sufficiency and integration into a local community,<sup>21</sup> assistance programs have failed to give attention, as Knight does, to what is perhaps the most fundamental cause of the so-called "dependency syndrome."

*The problems of ethics and adequacy of knowledge are clearly pertinent here. It may be inappropriate to single out the Ik [or refugees] for displaying what appears to be at most a particular manifestation of a clearly panspecific human reaction to food deprivation. It is somewhat more disturbing that so few professionals within the discipline appear to have recognized or considered this.*

March 1983

## NOTES

1. Practical experience elsewhere in the north, according to the Sudan Commissioner of Refugees, yielded many examples of exploitation by "traditional" chiefs. In Eastern Equatoria, agency workers who organize the administrative structure of settlements around those who claim traditional authority, without consultation and without introducing methods for the expulsion of dishonest or ineffective leaders, may find they are contributing to the re-emergence of a social structure as oppressive and exploitative as the one from which the refugees escaped.

2. Most households are comprised of fragments of families. After the seriously ill, the next group to arrive is often composed mainly of single young men, leading to the fear that they are guerrilla fighters who will accept material assistance and then return to the bush. Sometimes a single family member will leave the border area and join a settlement. Then after being there long enough to build a house, he returns to the border to collect the rest of his family. Since refugees are scattered in remote areas along the border, no one else could find their relatives for them. This practice was abruptly halted in September 1982 because the government became concerned that UNHCR vehicles were being used to transport guerrillas between settlements and the border.

3. Block leaders were asked to distribute food in the communal plot so that everyone could see, but many used their own compound instead, distributing to one household at a time. People were rarely informed officially as to what they were entitled to receive, although the full amount was never available anyway. Block leaders often "paid" themselves extra food for their work.

4. Even though the agency had funds provided by UNHCR, up to October it had not been able to employ suitable expatriate staff and, so far as I know, none of the money had been allocated to refugees, although they had themselves begun many activities, such as brick-making and charcoal production. SCC, through their social workers, had supported some other activities, such as tailoring.

5. A volunteer social worker in Goli approached the partner agency responsible for funding income-generating activities with a list of newly formed cooperatives that now needed tools and equipment. The agency staff member pointed out that it was necessary to prove that these cooperatives would be economically viable after the development money had been spent. He asked the social worker whether the necessary information on costs of raw materials, transport, and equipment was known, and if the market potential had been assessed both within the settlement and among the locals. He was warned that without a comprehensive proposal or "feasibility" study, support would not be forthcoming.

Refugees are unable (even if they know how) to collect such information and

write up a proposal for a project; most data is inaccessible to them without transport to do the market research and costing. There is no handbook or set of guidelines provided. Because of such problems, plans are too frequently not approved and projects are not implemented before the end of the budget year, and the monies are returned to their source.

6. The foreman of Goli settlement had been a refugee during the Sudan civil war. One night, as refugees were complaining about the lack of variety in the rations and the difficulty of getting weak children to eat, the foreman very quietly told them that when he was a child, he and his mother had lived for two years subsisting on wild roots in Zaïre. His own growth had been affected by this diet, and some of his siblings had not survived.

7. At one meeting, the foremen confronted the representative of the agency responsible for health with a comprehensive list of its inadequacies, information that contrasted with the formal reports the agency received from its settlement staff. While this sort of exchange should encourage the agency to improve, it also gave it a chance to remind refugees of the problems of local conditions which prevented their organizing a program to meet the standards Ugandans expected.

8. It was always difficult to persuade partner agency staff to recognize and cooperate with the administrative program. Health workers in settlements, for example, did not feel responsible to the foreman but to their agency. Health reports were made directly to the agency and these never reached the UNHCR office. The plan for monthly reports was designed to promote coordination.

9. The Ugandan government has recently been trying to convince the international community that all is now well and that refugees should return home. In a meeting on February 28, 1983 with the Sudanese Vice-President, Uganda's Vice-President, Paulo Muwanga, urged that authorities in southern Sudan should not allow Ugandan refugees to be "camp commandant" (i.e. foreman) lest such people would not wish to return home (*Summary of World Broadcasts*, ME/7271/B/1, March 2, 1983).

10. Residents of two settlements were especially slow in releasing tents even when houses were completed, for a tent provided more sleeping space for large households. The Program Officer finally took a policeman with him to Goli and started pulling out the ground pins to emphasize that the tents were needed elsewhere. The day before, we had found 400 people in a transit center with no shelter from the cold rain: 25 adults were lying on the ground extremely ill, and there were countless severely malnourished children among the group. In the absence of food and other supplies, a few tents would have relieved a little of the misery at least.

11. It is understandable that both the Ugandan and Sudanese governments pre-

fer refugee settlements to be situated as far from the border as possible. From the host government's point of view, refugees attract military incursions. The Ugandan government was naturally suspicious that settlements could be used as guerrilla bases. In July 1982, Uganda demanded that the Sudanese government move some established settlements that they deemed "too close." There was no consensus among agency personnel and Sudan officials in the southern region as to just how far a settlement must be from the border — fifty miles or fifty kilometers. Nor could they agree on how this distance should be measured — by road or as the crow flies. Since it was nearly impossible to apply either distance consistently, arbitrary decisions had to be made according to availability, willingness of local people to accept a settlement, etc. Since combatants on both sides used guerrilla tactics and had few vehicles, a few miles inland provided sufficient security. Most observers agree there are advantages in allowing refugees to settle "spontaneously," but there is no uniform policy; in the southern region of Sudan, as noted, assistance was confined to refugees in the planned settlements, while in Zaïre refugees living on the border were assisted by UNHCR.

12. My data on this topic is so extensive it must wait for a later *Report*. The most extreme example, however, was the re-emergence of the belief in poisoning or witchcraft which led to the near murder of many individuals. Suicide attempts also occurred, and children were often abandoned.

13. C. Turnbull, *The Mountain People* (New York, Touchstone Books, 1972).

14. Vol.15, No.1, March 1974 to Vol.17, No.4, December 1976.

15. *Current Anthropology*, Vol.17, No.4, December 1976.

16. A. Keys, J. Borzek, A. Henschel, O. Michelsen and H. Taylor, *The Biology of Human Starvation*, 2 vols., (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1950).

17. C. Turnbull, *Traditions and Change in African Tribal Life*, (Cleveland, World, 1966).

18. The cereal normally provided by WFP was *dura* which is more nutritious than rice, although refugees complained they were unaccustomed to eating it. But rice was the cereal eaten during most of my stay in Western Equatoria because a quantity had been donated by the Japanese. A representative from the UNHCR emergency unit in Geneva pointed out that refugees would be unable to eat enough rice to get the necessary calories, and noted that their health was likely to decline as a result of this choice of cereal. Handbooks advise that the customary diet of refugees be studied and supplied to them. No attempt was made to do this in Western Equatoria.

19. Oil could be extracted by a method similar to that used for dried palm nuts in West Africa. The trees were few and widely scattered; probably all belonged

to some local person, as rights over permanent tree crops are usually owned in Africa.

The oil from the lulu tree could be used for making soap. When soap was part of the relief supplies, the ration was one-half tablet per month. Lack of soap was not the only thing that made it difficult for refugees to respond to appeals for cleanliness: the ration of cooking pots was one to a household when they were available — which meant that people had no means of storing water while using their pot for cooking.

Most water for drinking should have been boiled, or at least filtered. Some knew how to make clay water jars, and, where the clay was available, pots were produced and sometimes fitted with traditional water filters. Clay was not widely available, however.

20. There is wide disagreement on how to measure degrees of malnutrition and sampling techniques leave much to be desired. Adults displayed the swelling and oedema associated with Kwashiorkor. Refugees who have been on the move within Uganda or living on the border for more than two years have been drinking from contaminated water sources and probably the majority of adults and children were affected by intestinal parasites. Equipment to analyse these was scarce, as were the drugs to treat them.

21. The evidence from the studies cited by James Knight lends some weight to Turnbull's recommended solution: the forcible removal of the Ik community to widely scattered parts of Uganda so that their behavior would not be mutually reinforced! When I visited the Sahrawi refugees on behalf of OXFAM in 1981, I was warned in advance to look for evidence that the Polisario Front (the political party in charge of the settlements) was using coercive techniques on the refugees. OXFAM wanted to be certain that any assistance they might give would reach the poorest of the poor. The experience in Western Equatoria has considerably altered my views on the question of coercion in some situations, but the most important question remains, *coercion by whom?*