

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

The guns may be silent in Mozambique, but...

Casey C. Kelso
Harare, Zimbabwe
October 15, 1992

Peter Bird Martin
Institute of Current World Affairs
4 West Wheelock Street
Hanover, New Hampshire, U.S.A.

Dear Peter:

"We don't know where he comes from or who his family is, but maybe when he's ready he'll tell us," said 87-year-old Benjamin Kagarazfa, the "mayor" in a small section of a Mozambican refugee camp in Zimbabwe. He rubbed the boy's head like he would soothe a frightened little goat. "His name is Samieri. He came by himself last week but one, on a Monday."



Samieri and his foster mother.

Kagarazfa, like Samieri, is a resident of the Nyangombe Refugee Camp near... near... Well, it isn't near any inhabited town. The camp is in an arid wasteland all by itself, on the banks of the Nyangombe River, which has almost dried up. It's six or seven hours by car along a dirt track north of the tarred road between Harare and the eastern city of Mutare.

Samieri's face looked blank as a stone as he tagged along a tour of an agricultural project designed to teach camp children about the natural environment in Mozambique that they've never seen. He showed no emotion at seeing a family of piglets frolicking around the mother sow. He stood impassively before a goat pen where a newborn kid wobbled in play. He finally allowed a tiny grin to appear when posing for a photo next to his "temporary mother," but it quickly faded. Samieri is one of

thousands of unaccompanied children in the camps and a speck in the flood of exiles crossing the border daily into Zimbabwe.

Casey Kelso is a fellow of the institute studying the societies, economies and food production systems of Southern Africa.

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There is a new type of refugee in the present exodus from Mozambique. Earlier asylum seekers fled from the brutal violence of the Mozambican civil war, which left houses burned, food stolen, and people mutilated, dead or kidnapped. Now famine has forced hundreds of thousands more people to flee to neighboring countries at a time when peace seems nearer than ever before.

Mozambican President Joaquim Chissano and rebel leader Afonso Dhlakama signed a peace accord in Rome earlier this month, which will be implemented by United Nations observers who arrived in the country this week. Culminating two years of difficult talks, the agreement sent a signal to military units on both sides to stop the fighting. Within a month, all government troops and guerrillas of the Mozambique National Resistance, known by its Portuguese acronym of Renamo, must gather in UN-monitored assembly points and turn in their guns. The pact also calls for a new army to be formed from the two forces and multi-party elections to be held within one year. Press reports have hailed the accord as the end of 17 years of war and the beginning of national reconstruction.

But as champagne glasses clinked in Italy, the trample of refugees grew louder by the day. The current influx into Zimbabwe has swelled the number of official refugees in the Zimbabwe camps from 98,000 a few months ago to more than 150,000. In Malawi, the refugee count now tops 1.3 million. Zambia has 25,000 with more on the way. South Africa, which has 350,000 refugees, reports large influxes, too. The drought ravaging Southern Africa means that even if the ceasefire holds, it will be at least a year if not longer before millions of Mozambicans can return home. Inside the country, at least three million people face starvation if they do not receive help soon, according to the United Nations.

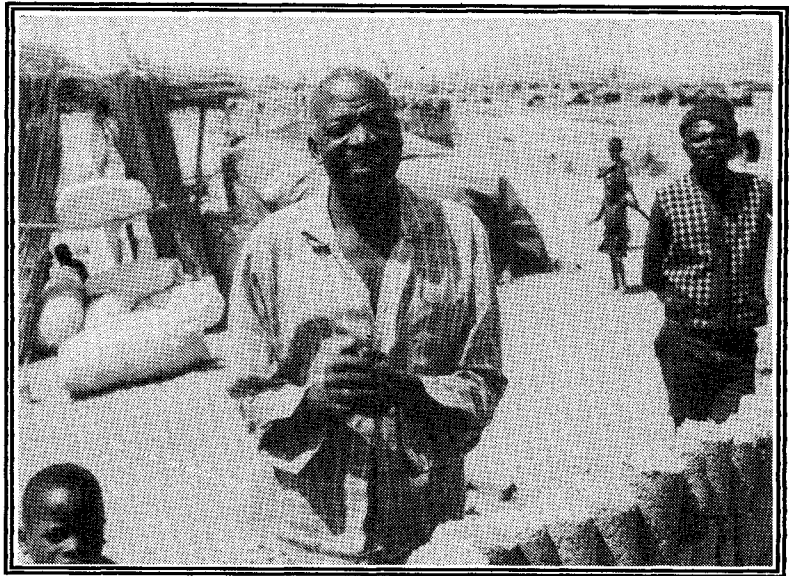
In Zimbabwe's camps, the drought-induced flow of refugees has created a sense of emergency. In Nyangombe Refugee Camp, for example, the population jumped by 4,000 people up to 22,085 in less than three weeks. Its planned capacity is 20,000. Said Camp Administrator Misheck Zengeya: "The guns may be silent but the drought will be in Mozambique for an indefinite period."

The origins of the refugee predicament

Kagarazfa, little Samieri and the boy's foster mother make a striking contrast, in both sizes and circumstances. The old man said he was visiting his sister married to a Zimbabwean when Zimbabwe soldiers picked him up and brought him to the camp in 1984. Many refugees fleeing violence in Mozambique arrived in the early 1980s to settle in Zimbabwe's northern and eastern districts, where they worked as laborers on commercial farms, cultivated communal land given them by local headmen or lived in settlements unassisted by authorities. Their numbers were then

small enough, so Zimbabwe residents could host the Mozambicans.

By 1984, however, Zimbabwe's government had been strongly criticized for not helping refugees. At the same time, cross-border raids by the South-African backed Renamo deepened security concerns. Hundreds of civilians were killed on the Zimbabwe side of the border. Four camps were established and refugees were



Benjamin Kagarazfa thought he would be away from home for a few months. It has been eight years.

rounded up, among them Kagarazfa. (An estimated 100,000 Mozambicans are still settled outside the camps today, although many of them are joining the influx into the camps as Zimbabwean farmers lay off laborers because of the drought.)

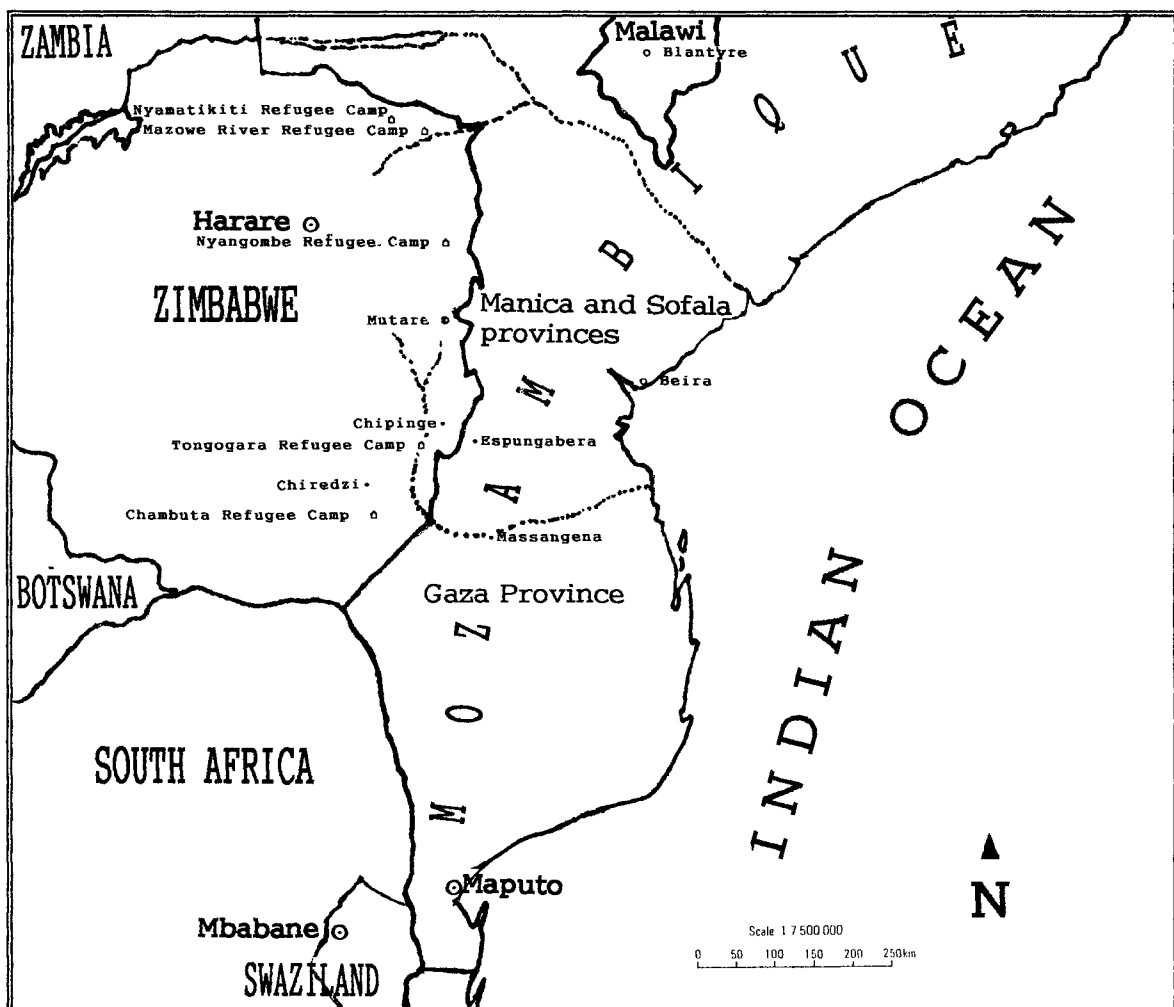
The steady stream of refugees suddenly surged in 1987 when Renamo stepped up its attacks with South African assistance. A fifth camp opened in 1988 to accommodate the tens of thousands of people fleeing to the safety of Zimbabwe, among them Samieri's foster mother. Many brought with them horrifying tales of Renamo terrorism and atrocities. A U.S. State Department consultant commissioned to do an independent study on the carnage in Mozambique that year accused Renamo of carrying out "the worst holocaust" since World War II.

Samieri is among the third generation of refugees, most of whom are victims of drought. An average of 500 people are crossing into Zimbabwe each day in search of food, shelter and peace. These are people who eked out an existence amid brutal banditry as Renamo rebels took what little food existed from the villages under their control. Drought then accomplished what 17 years of war could not. The crops, gardens and even the wild nuts and berries are gone in many remote areas where most of the new refugees lived. The new arrivals are weak and emaciated, some near death. They tell of hundreds of others left behind who were too malnourished to make the long walk. In Mozambique's northern regions of Luipo and Alua, for example, the International Committee of the Red Cross estimates at least 15 percent of the population has died since February.

"After all the years of conflict, drought has pushed another 70,000 people to leave Mozambique," said Henry Fournier, the head of the ICRC mission in Southern Africa. "I don't believe they left for an economic reason, if they stayed all those years during the war. They leave now because it's a question of survival. Tens upon tens of bodies are found on the borders."

Preventive medicine to ward off refugee problems

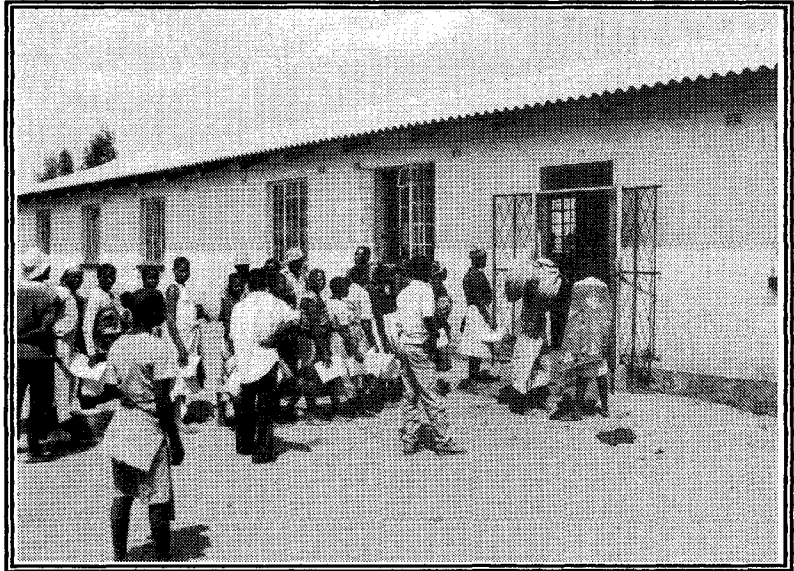
To get food into the remote areas being fast abandoned by refugees, the ICRC trucks began rolling across the Zimbabwe border into Mozambique this month. This follows an agreement by Renamo to allow humanitarian assistance to regions it had previously declared off-limits. Food is being moved from Zimbabwe because war has left most roads mined and bridges blown-up outside Mozambique's capital of Maputo and its main port, Beira.



The two biggest relief organizations, the ICRC and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, have divided up Mozambique. Fournier tapped his finger on the map, showing his organizations's concentration on Mozambique's Sofala and Manica provinces, along with the northern portion of Gaza Province. Each week, advance teams are moving into fifteen or sixteen base camps to sign up those needing food and to scout out safe roads. So far, the first shipments of relief supplies have reached areas in Massangena, a distant town in Gaza Province that is home to about 30,000 people. The cross-border food distribution could act like preventive medicine, Fournier said. By providing food inside Mozambique, he hopes to reduce the number of refugees leaving their homes that will eventually need to be repatriated.

Donald Kowet, the UNHCR deputy representative in Zimbabwe, said he sees only more Mozambicans coming over the horizon. He painted an image akin to the quintessential tale of Malthusian doom from the original Ripley's Believe It Or Not book. The old editions sported a front-cover illustration of an infinitely long column of Chinese peasants dwindling into the distance, with the caption:

"If all the Chinese of the world marched four abreast past a given point, they would never finish crossing!" To listen to Kowet, Zimbabwe may never see the last of the refugees.



New arrivals are given blankets and food, but first they are isolated until inoculated against disease.

"I don't think it's going to finish up quickly," Kowet said. "If the famine is going to continue -- and it will -- we'll still be dealing with the influx next year. I had a long discussion with the Mozambican district administrator in Espungabera (a border town a few miles into Mozambique from the Zimbabwe border). He has 400 people coming in every day, but he hasn't received any food for two weeks. He told me if he doesn't get food next week, most of the 100,000 population will go across to Zimbabwe. And that's just one area among hundreds."

The UNHCR has appropriated one emergency budget after another to cope with the surge in refugees into Zimbabwe. Now more money is being sought for a sixth refugee camp to open early next year. All the camps are crowded beyond their capacity. Assuming the refugees would be in Zimbabwe for a short time, the camps were originally planned to be temporary. No one thought of planting crops or gardens, so Mozambicans are jammed into huts with little land. This makes them dependent on aid agencies for food, water and shelter. "We never thought of having offices back then because no one thought they would be here for years, so the case work was being done under trees," a camp administrator said.

Relief aid workers in Tongogara Refugee Camp, the largest with a population of 45,000, claim the official count of the refugees inside the camp is an underestimate. Many Mozambicans fired from the neighboring commercial farms arrive at the camp in search of food, but avoid registering with the administration. These refugees have a revealing motive: Tongogara is officially closed to arrivals, so newcomers must go to Chambuta -- a camp with a deadly reputation.

A public health nightmare

Chambuta Refugee Camp, which opened in 1988 to hold a maximum of 20,000 people, now has a population surpassing 25,000. The crush began in June when 3,000 additional people arrived. The next month brought 3,900 more. Then, 4,500 refugees came in August. Last month, 10 to 20 people a day showed up at the camp, near the town of Chiredzi. The past-capacity crowds "more than overstretched" medical facilities, to use the expression of the government's commissioner of refugees. The system eventually snapped at Chambuta and a public health nightmare began. The very young and the very old began dying from measles and dehydration, illnesses that would not normally kill a healthy individual.

"August was one of the worst months in the history of the camp," said Israel Chokuwenga, the camp administrator. "That month 206 people died, due to disease and malnourishment. The refugees were too weak, too wasted, too dehydrated. They couldn't even walk to the clinic, so we literally had to go household to household shoving them into vehicles to bring them in. We had 10 to 15 deaths a day." Chokuwenga began stuttering when he talked about the deaths. With only 174 fatalities in September, he said the situation has greatly improved. "Y-y-you know, we had never dealt with an emergency situation, but w-w-we've learned how to deal with it. A-a-although refugees are always an e-emergency, this now was even more of an e-e-emergency than before."

In response, the camp's staff set up a second satellite clinic closer to the huts to ensure quick diagnosis. Nearby, women cook continuously during the day in a supplementary feeding

program for children. "Milk bars" serve high-protein drinks for all school-age students. Those showing symptoms of measles and other contagious diseases are sent to stay in a flapping canvas tent with a dirty black plastic sheet for a floor.

The feeble condition of the newest arrivals contributed to the death toll, but there are other reasons as well. Sanitary conditions are poor in the overcrowded camp. Scores of open-pit latrines dug several months ago are still in use, while improved outhouses are slowly being constructed. Water pumps meant to serve smaller numbers are now surrounded most hours of the day by long lines of refugees waiting for the chance to fill a bucket. There is no concrete apron around the pumps, so run-off water collects in stagnant pools and mud fouls the feet of all.

Malnutrition also contributed to the high mortality rate because the long-sought food relief could not match demand. Shortages of cornmeal and cooking oil hit the camp. The increased population forced a reduction in food rations below 400 grams per person, which is the minimum established by the United Nation's World Food Programme. At the same time, the wells dried up because of drought.

It was then that Chokuwenga made an unpopular decision: He abruptly banned the watering of all subsistence gardens and agricultural projects.



Each hand pump serves about 1,000 people.

"We had flourishing gardens, but I stopped all horticultural projects at the peak of the drought when we hit 20,000," he said. "The Baptists had a gardening project, and we stopped them. All the fruit trees died. Even tomatoes not ready to be harvested dried up before they could be eaten. I got a lot of anger from my colleagues, but I did it for our survival."

The lack of shelter during what are Zimbabwe's winter months of June, July and August also worsened conditions at Chambuta. More than 2,300 households are without adequate shelter because they have not received any wooden poles or thatch to build a hut. For them, the family home depends upon their inventiveness with a

sheet of plastic. While Zimbabweans are hoping for rain, the refugees worry about how they would take shelter during a storm. Those living in Nyangombe camp face the same predicament.



Looking like children at play, two refugees mount ever-more-shaky mud walls higher.

Each new family there should receive a plot 33 by 12 meters, dozens of wooden poles, up to five ridge beams and grass thatching to construct a home. But there is no wood and thatch. Some refugees are building walls after ingeniously crafting sand-and-mud bricks using small tin cans, like children building sand castles at the seashore. It's a clever innovation, but one that will ultimately prove futile when the coming rains dissolve the poor structures. "What choice do we have?" one

refugee asked as he tamped earth into his makeshift mold. "The war (in Mozambique) has affected everything and even if we could go somewhere to find food, it was confiscated by the bandidos."

The significance of wood

Lack of wood, for building structures or for fires, is more than just a troublesome aspect in a refugee's existence. The crisis in wood neatly defines the difficulty authorities have in dealing with the refugee issue. The previous experience of aid organizations in "normal" development projects doesn't apply to refugees because of their lack of social structure and their impermanence in these camps. Indeed, both social customs and relief efforts can unwittingly compound the shortage of wood.

Wood has become a scarce resource in the camps because of the huge demand by refugees. Initially, they ate in communal kitchens. The system lasted only a year or two because of allegations of favoritism and fears by relief workers that such group feeding bred a psychological dependency. Now, all food is handed out in dry rations, so refugees must find firewood for cooking. Still more wood is needed to build two or three houses for each family, but camp administrators will provide wood -- when they get it -- for just one simple hut. What may seem to be

an extravagance is in reality a critical requirement for a stable household. Unlike refugees elsewhere in the world, these Mozambicans are polygamous. Most have two, three or even four wives, who cannot live together in the same hut without friction.

The wood shortage has reached crisis proportions. In a radius of several miles around the camps, the land is bare of deadwood. Outside the Mazowe River Bridge and Nyamatikiti camps, which sprawl near each other in northeast Zimbabwe, there are only acres of stumps and denuded slopes. Environmental degradation caused by erosion is visible in the heavy siltation of the Mazowe River. This was once a flowing river even in the dry season, yet now locals say that rain fails to make more than small pools of stagnant water in the soil-clogged riverbed.

Ngoni Jakaza, in charge of the Mazowe camp, remembers the countryside as wild bush in 1985. Now, it is a semi-desert. In the interval, more than 34,000 refugees settled in the camp. "We're buying wood from the small commercial farmers around the camp to give to the refugees, but we can't keep up," Jakaza said. "Even if we provide them with some wood, they'll cut more."

Culture and habit are strong forces at work in deforestation. Most refugees, indeed most Africans, regard fire as a symbol of family. Without a fire, they believe one is reduced to the level of an animal. Fires are not only for warmth and cooking. As the only source of light after nightfall, a fire is the family's social center where stories are told or discussions held. And not everyone sits around the same fire. As a sign of respect, social custom dictates that older men should have a fire separate from the women and children. At bedtime, people sleep by a fire for warmth or even throughout the hot summer nights, out of habit.

The old taboos and systems of resource regulation, on the other hand, are destroyed in the flight from a small and remote village to a high-density camp. No longer is there a chief to designate areas for cutting wood or to prevent certain trees from being chopped down. Among the Nyungwe, a main Mozambican cultural group, there is a traditional prohibition against cutting down fruit trees. Yet these, too, are felled in the burning desire for



Women spend much of their time collecting wood for the family.

wood. "When there are no other trees left, what alternatives do we have?" one refugee asked a development aid officer. At all the camps, refugees have begun cutting living, green wood. Such wet wood burns poorly, so in normal times no one considers burning it as firewood. Those caught at Tongogara camp are punished by being forced to dig graves. For superstitious rural folk, graves and cemeteries hold a special terror, yet green and leafy trees continue to fall to their hungry axes.

Refugees say they cover up to 10 kilometers to forage for wood. A recent study found individuals in camps use almost two kilograms of wood each day, or about 17 kilograms per family. For some camps, this means a daily total of almost 60 tons. These figures don't include wood used for the 48-hour brewing of traditional beer, which is done more than 20 times a week by camp residents. Slowly cooking a concoction of corn and sorghum mash over a fire consumes much wood: experts estimate almost 260 kilos for each brew. Although it seems a luxury, beer is as necessary as food. Beer is used in initiation ceremonies for girls coming of age, marriages, funerals and propitiating ancestral spirits to avert bad luck. Traditional healers are consulted about most problems and often prescribe beer brewing as a cure-all.



Children waiting for the next round of feeding.

Supplementary feeding schemes sponsored by World Vision, Save The Children and other groups compound the fuel crisis. Each child participating in the program is expected to bring wood to help cook the food. At other times, refugee women are sent out to collect wood for fires kindled four, five or six times a day. "It's not an exchange," the camp administrator said. "But a mischievous person purposely

won't bring firewood, so to that person, we say: 'Go bring your share of wood.' We make the women participate in the program."

Another project creating unintended demand for wood is a successful Norwegian skills training center at the Mazowe camp. Since it began in 1985, about 8,000 woodworkers have been trained and equipped with chisels, planes and saws. Upon completing their

classes, the trainees used to sit around idle, forbidden from earning Zimbabwe dollars. Now that they are allowed to sell their work for private profit, the center's storeroom holds stools, chairs, tables and cabinets for sale to visitors and staff. "They don't cut just any tree, but look for specific trees like the mukwa and the muramaropa," instructor Adam Sabanda said. "Those trees are becoming hard to find, but we encourage them to plant others." Sabanda couldn't say if anyone has yet planted a tree.



The Tsotso stove may reduce firewood consumption in the camps, if it's accepted.

Camp officials delayed addressing the shortage of wood with a reforestation plan, assuming the refugees would be temporarily in Zimbabwe. Without any special incentive, the refugees did nothing as well. They saw no point in planting trees that would mature long after they returned home.

Earlier this year, 15 organizations working in the camps formed a coalition to tackle the fuelwood problem. The main project of the Fuelwood Crisis Consortium is to promote the Tsotso stove (tsotso means "twigs" in the Shona language). The fuel-efficient stove requires only twigs and small branches. One study found the stove uses one-third less wood than a fire traditionally built between three stones. So far, at least 4,000 stoves have been introduced into the refugee camps. One refugee woman proudly modeled her stove for inquisitive visitors. A glance

inside the pot, however, showed nothing cooking. The woman admitted she uses the stove sparingly because it wobbles too much during vigorous stirring when fixing the staple corn meal paste.

The consortium also mounted a tree-planting program and an educational campaign targeting the camp's children and women. Plays, songs, films and contests are used to foster environmental awareness. The goal is to get 700,000 trees in the ground. So far, participants planted 120,000 seeds for later transplanting.

"The issue of ownership is critical," said consortium director Gus Le Breton. "In Nyangombe, the government forestry commission got the refugees to plant trees. But four years later, when refugees cut them, the commission stormed down. So now, it's very important to make sure they know these trees will be theirs because a natural resource is useless if you can't use it."

Looking forward to goodbye

No professional working in the camps wants refugees to suffer from disease or hunger, but neither do they want the Mozambicans to become too settled. The underlying concept of a refugee camp is the opposite of community development. Refugee assistance is designed to help displaced persons survive until they can return to their country, so camp officials discourage bettering the lives of refugees with permanent improvements like land, better-than-adequate homes, extra water pumps or orchards.

"You don't let refugees forget life can be tough, so eventually they will go back home," said the ICRC's Fournier. With schools, clinics, jobs and even small businesses begun in host countries, he said refugees may think twice about losing more than what they can gain back in their war-torn homeland.

Home for Mozambicans is the world's poorest country, where an estimated two-thirds of the national budget comes from foreign aid. Even with immediate peace, economists predict the nation's standard of living won't even reach its 1981 level for at least a decade. More than 80 percent of the schools have been destroyed or closed during the wartime chaos and Renamo has destroyed almost 1,000 health clinics. The economy has ground to a halt.

The worst fear of camp officials is that refugees who go back to Mozambique could return again, if drought continues or civil strife flares up. This could result in a "Ethiopia/Somalia Syndrome," when returning refugees register on both sides of a border, moving backward and forward to survive on a network of well-intentioned assistance. Indeed, the UNHCR contends some refugees in Malawi have done this for the past two years.

But when the human tide finally turns and mass refugee repatriation begins, one of the most difficult tasks in the reconstruction of Mozambique will be rebuilding families fractured by the war. A majority of the adult refugees are women, but children make up the largest group -- 57 percent. War has left an estimated 250,000 orphaned. Thousands of others, like Samieri with whom this essay began, are mysteries. Their faces stare down from photos on the walls of the ICRC offices in each refugee camp and in Mozambique. These are the unaccompanied children searching for relatives. For now, however, they are cared for by other refugees who volunteer for the job.

"It's not a big deal right now because people receive rations for a disassociated child," Fournier said. "But I can tell you on the day to go home, there will be hundreds of foster parents saying: 'We only agreed to do this in the camp. This is just too much to ask.'"

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Casey", with a stylized flourish extending from the end.

Received in Hanover 10/28/92