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Vocational training for women refugees in Africa

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1. The plight of women refugees

The majority of refugees in Africa are women and children. While this fact is constantly reiterated for the purpose of raising funds, it is generally disregarded in the design of refugee-assistance programmes that go beyond the emergency phase. In other words, publicity stresses a basic fact that the programmes themselves largely ignore.

Adult women refugees outnumber adult men, both in organised receiving camps and in spontaneously settled encampments, particularly when there has been a large influx of refugees during a short period of time. Whether the cause is war or a natural disaster such as drought, it is predominantly women who are forced to flee to a place of refuge with their children and other dependants; a large number of the men separate themselves, at least temporarily, from their families, either to fight in the war or to seek employment elsewhere, unencumbered. Consequently, many refugee families are headed by women. In Somalia, for example, where approximately half a million refugees are sheltered in over 30 camps, it was estimated in 1981 that women constituted 30 per cent of the population and children under 15 years of age 60 per cent. Of the 10 per cent of adult male refugees, many were old or handicapped. In the Sudan in the same year, 40 per cent of the refugee households that had spontaneously settled in Port Sudan over the previous ten years were headed by women.

In the first years after flight, particularly, most households are headed by women, and are dependent on them for survival. While the demographic imbalance is generally somewhat redressed with time, as semi-permanent settlements develop and men rejoin their families, women nevertheless continue to constitute the majority of adult refugees and women-headed refugee households are the rule and not the exception.

Yet, once basic needs such as food, shelter and health care have been met, once the emergency phase is over and long-term assistance programmes are introduced, male refugees become the major target group. The refugee,

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by definition, becomes "he" and projects intended to provide training, employment and incomes are geared primarily to "him". Women are generally relegated to the status of a "special" minority group within these programmes, and are often included in projects for the old and the handicapped. Policy formulation and programme design pay little heed to the women's vital role in ensuring their family's survival. As the Economic Commission for Africa commented in 1984:

> Concepts of vulnerability were found to be applied indiscriminately so that able-bodied women and widows were lumped together with the aged, disabled and handicapped, and their energies channelled into traditional, marginal and unproductive welfare activities.[1]

When durable solutions are sought through programmes designed to develop productive activities that can bring refugees much-needed income and lessen their reliance on external aid, policies and strategies differ little from those that have shaped development plans in Africa for the past three decades. As in conventional programmes designed for settled communities, women are treated as a separate group that plays a secondary role in the productive activities of the family and the community. If this approach bears little relation to reality in most African countries, it borders on the absurd when applied to refugees.

It is certainly true that women refugees face a host of problems, but these problems are those confronted by the majority of adult refugees, not by a "special group". Without their menfolk, and placed in an entirely new environment after the trauma of flight and the crisis that precipitated it, women must solve the family's immediate problems of survival, food and shelter. And once these essentials have been secured, they must continue to care for the household and its members, and reorganise their daily working lives to adapt themselves to their new circumstances.

They provide the essential labour, services and organisation that enable a refugee household to survive. As Ingrid Palmer has pointed out:

> The pivotal role of women in the family is highlighted by the fact that if the refugee father dies, the family stays together, but if the mother dies the family often disintegrates, with special problems of fostering out the children when there are no close kin.[2]

Women form the main productive group within a camp or settlement, and as such they should be a major target group for long-term assistance aimed at ensuring the self-reliance of the refugee population.

With the enormous growth of these populations in Africa over the past decade, the search for durable solutions to help refugees achieve self-reliance has become increasingly urgent. However, past efforts to devise programmes to that end have not met with much success. Whether in holding camps such

[1] Economic Commission for Africa (ECA): *Refugee and displaced women in Africa* (Addis Ababa, 1984).

[2] I. Palmer: *Women refugees in urban and rural settlement*, Paper presented to a seminar on Sudanese refugees held in Khartoum in September 1982.

as those in Somalia or Djibouti, or settlements such as those in Zaire or the Sudan which have made some provision for agricultural production, most of the refugees have remained largely dependent on external aid for their day-to-day survival. It could certainly be argued that aid has not achieved its long-term objectives at least in part because it is not geared primarily to the characteristics, skills or needs of the majority of the adult refugee population, but has been based instead on preconceived notions of what aid is most suitable, and for whom. Most refugee assistance intended to solve the problems of dependency has been geared to men who play a secondary role in the organisation and support of refugee families.

2. Why have women been left out?

This concentration on aid to men is to some extent explicable: it is quicker and easier to provide training, employment and self-employment opportunities to men than it is to women because men are more mobile, less socially restricted in the type of work they can undertake, and have more time at their disposal since they are neither engaged in productive work nor encumbered by daily household responsibilities. Unlike the majority of women, many men have received some education and are at least partially literate. Men's vocational skills are more often immediately relevant to their new situation because they are geared to a cash economy (e.g. leather and metal work), while the products women customarily make are usually destined for home use, and their skills are widely shared rather than confined to a speciality trade group.

But to these practical reasons why assistance concentrates on men others must be added: the bias of policy-makers and aid workers, who continue to consider the male-headed household as the norm even where female-headed households predominate; and the assumption that the man is invariably the primary producer for the family, whose economic welfare consequently depends on his efforts. The failure to take into account the value of women's work outside the formal economy has been matched by the widespread stereotyping of women's participation within the economy. These same failures are reflected in refugee situations. The Western male-headed household model has often been exported by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for application in the camps. Camp censuses, statistics, skill inventories, training opportunities and selection procedures focus first and foremost on men, whose names are often the only ones registered. In a socio-economic survey of refugees in Somalia in 1982, for example, all women's previous work was described simply as "home economics". Adults classified as pastoralists, settled farmers or urban dwellers were not disaggregated by sex; the only sex-specific information given was the number of female-headed households, labelled as a "special group" although they were in the majority in some camps. In a camp of

Angolan refugees in Zaire, foreign aid workers registered only men refugees on their arrival, and three years later a visiting consultant found that "there was malnutrition amongst [the women], and neglected skills as well".[3]

Even agricultural schemes for refugees are usually geared to men, although it is women in most African countries who perform the greater share of agricultural tasks, produce most of the food for home consumption and provide much of the labour for cash crops. Yet women refugees in Somalia, during meetings with ILO (women) consultants, expressed a fervent wish to be given the opportunity to farm and also expressed surprise and disappointment that the farming projects then being developed were reserved for men.

A new approach by policy-makers and aid workers is needed to reach the bulk of adult refugees and their families and to develop productive activities that can, to some extent, replace the aid on which they are totally dependent. A more effective strategy clearly entails, as a first step, identifying women refugees as the primary group for assistance; and, secondly, designing major training and employment-generating programmes based on women's existing or potential productive abilities. Such an approach is imperative if more than a minority of refugees are to be assisted, and if the objective of even partial self-sufficiency of a refugee community is to be achieved. This cannot be done if women's energies continue to be channelled into activities more akin to occupational therapy than to gainful employment.

In redirecting assistance to refugee women as a major target group attention must also be paid to the immediate and urgent need of women refugees to earn a regular cash income. Even where food rations are regularly provided and other basic needs are met, families require essentials not included in the "aid basket": vegetables (scurvy among children is not uncommon in refugee camps), matches, tea, fresh milk, sometimes firewood or kerosene must be bought, as well as items that are provided free only irregularly such as soap, shoes and clothing. Women must often sell or barter a part of their rations to buy these necessities and therefore face lean days before the next ration distribution.

In almost every instance refugee camps, even in the remotest areas of a host country, soon develop their own internal economies, based on barter and cash exchange. Owing to the presence of aid agencies and the organisational needs of the camp, refugees are afforded employment opportunities, and markets develop as goods and services (tailoring, shoe repairs, grinding mills, tea shops, etc.) are supplied by refugees and the local population. Women refugees are usually peripheral to most of these activities.

There are very few opportunities for wage employment for refugee women. Far fewer women than men have enough education to find

[3] L. Bonnerjea et al.: *Shaming the world: The needs of women refugees* (London, World University Service and Change, 1985).

employment as interpreters or in low-level administrative work offered by camp authorities and aid agencies; and few qualify for training schemes aimed at providing the refugee community with its own schoolteachers, community leaders and adult education workers. Nor do women have easy access to unskilled jobs: men are hired as porters, watchmen or manual labourers, whereas generally women find employment only as food handlers at distribution points (often part-time work) and as junior staff in health-related programmes. Most women must therefore rely either on their own entrepreneurial abilities to earn an income, or on the income-generating opportunities directly afforded by projects carried out by aid agencies.

Women's unassisted entrepreneurial activities are generally confined to petty trading in basic commodities (a handful of tomatoes and onions, a few boxes of matches, a tin or two of tomato paste sold by the spoonful); making and selling handicrafts such as fibre baskets or sleeping mats; and selling snacks or meals prepared at home from roadside stalls or in markets. These activities, which make up the bulk of women's business ventures, require very little capital and usually provide a tiny income in which little or no account is taken of the women's labour time. As a rule, only a handful of women have enough capital to run a shop or a market stall with adequate stocks. Most businesses of any size in refugee camps or settlements are run by men, refugee and non-refugee.

Thus, in the unfamiliar conditions and alien environment of holding and settlement camps where they are unable to practise their main productive activities linked to agriculture or pastoralism, most women are dependent on the income-generating opportunities provided by aid agencies. Such projects however reach only a small fraction of them and are almost always overshadowed by major development programmes. The range of these so-called "women's projects" is usually quite narrow, confined largely to the production of handicrafts for which there is no great demand.

Other common projects include tailoring (usually far more tailors are trained than the market can absorb) and small-scale poultry-raising and vegetable gardening, both of which are generally geared to family consumption rather than income earning and are often linked to nutrition training. Some small-scale enterprises engaged in soap and honey production or simple food processing (in the Sudan and Somalia, for example) have shown some income-earning potential but have encountered problems (particularly in camps situated in remote areas) with the procurement of raw materials, packaging and transportation to regular sales outlets, and therefore require continued assistance from aid agencies. The management training for women producers in these enterprises has not met with much success, and in several instances literate men refugees have later been included to act as managers.

Refugees, men or women, are not regarded as creditworthy in the conventional sense and usually have no access to loans through the normal, official channels in their host country. Over the past ten years, however,

special programmes have been launched to make credit available to refugee entrepreneurs, but these loans are seldom granted to refugee women. Indeed, several credit programmes for urban refugees (e.g. in Lesotho and Kenya) have considered women *as a group* to be lacking in the entrepreneurial qualities needed to qualify for credit, mainly because they are thought to be "socially handicapped" by their family responsibilities, restricted mobility and lack of education. Loans for sewing machines to women (urban and rural) who have received tailoring training, however, are not uncommon – though this type of activity has seldom provided a living wage in a saturated market dominated by male tailors. In exceptional cases, refugee women have received credit to expand their existing businesses, as in Port Sudan, where a scheme granting loans to tea, snack and cooked-food sellers and other very small operators, and running a training and extension service suited to women's specific needs and work schedules, has resulted in considerably increased earnings and improved management skills for the beneficiaries.

Farming opportunities are sometimes provided for groups of women. There is always a strong demand for such work since it can provide a decent income if the plots are large enough and the produce is geared to market demand. But, in general, these "women's farms" are more modest in scale and inputs than agricultural schemes intended for male-headed refugee families, and thus less likely to provide a sufficient income and an alternative to dependence on aid.

There are several factors that combine to explain the limited range of assistance supplied to both rural and urban women refugees and the failure of many training programmes and income-generating projects to reach them. Women with large families and heavy household responsibilities, who are in greatest need of earning an income, have very little time to engage in most aid-assisted employment or training schemes where the hours of attendance are usually incompatible with a woman's normal working day. As noted earlier, many of the skills women bring with them are not directly relevant to employment or self-employment in their new environment, while training for new occupations is restricted to what is regarded as "suitable" and respectable by the refugees' own community and by aid workers. The restrictive, preconceived notions of "suitability" are compounded by a general ignorance of women's needs and skills, whether in camps or in urban areas, which severely hampers effective training and assistance for income earning from the start.

The existing organisational structure of a camp or settlement ensures that women's needs remain unseen and unheard. Camp officials at all levels are almost always male, and it is they who control every aspect of the camp's administration and the allocation of resources, including employment opportunities, provided by the aid agencies. Particularly in the larger camps, foreign aid agencies have to rely on the more informed knowledge of these officials (or of their own interpreters, drawn from among the educated male

refugee population) to identify refugees most in need of assistance, and the most appropriate type. Hence it is not surprising that women's needs are often overlooked or misunderstood and aid is misdirected. Even where women's organisations have been formed in camps, they tend to rely on male patronage and are seldom involved in decision-making. Generally, their function is to mobilise women for mass campaigns such as child immunisation or periodic clearing of accumulated trash. Women are powerless to influence what kind of aid they will receive; water-points, supplementary feeding centres, clinics – all used predominantly by them – are placed and organised without consulting women. Even food aid is frequently inappropriate: dried beans, which form an important part of refugee rations, require lengthy cooking whereas firewood becomes increasingly scarce in the rapidly denuded areas around large holding camps.

Similarly, counselling and extension services for urban refugees disregard their specific needs. It is difficult for women, particularly those with children, to find the time to go to counselling offices located in town centres. In some cases it is improper for a woman to visit a public place unattended by a male relative; in others women do not speak the official language and must supply their own (often hired) interpreters. In the Sudan in 1982 women comprised only 15 per cent of the urban refugees who requested counselling on employment and 10 per cent of those who sought medical counselling.

Camps and settlements generally have few, if any, female extension workers. Schemes to train community development workers from among the refugee population concentrate overwhelmingly on the recruitment of young men, who are free to attend courses which are generally held in towns far from the camps. As a result, community development efforts are guided by men and tend to ignore women's needs. Aid agencies which work directly with the leaders of women's organisations generally expect them to provide voluntarily what amounts to extension services for their projects; rarely are these women given resources for that purpose or an opportunity to upgrade their skills.

The generally discouraging experiences of projects that have aimed to assist refugee women, both urban and rural, must be seen in the context of the overall problems confronting refugees and assistance programmes which seek a durable solution. Aid to refugees to achieve self-reliance while they are in the host country has been characterised by a piecemeal and uncoordinated approach, most particularly in large camps or settlements.

3. NGOs and other aid agencies

While some programmes of long-term development assistance have been implemented by UN specialised agencies, the great majority have been undertaken by international non-governmental organisations. When a large

refugee influx first begins, the UNHCR and the host government usually rely to a very large extent on NGOs to establish basic health services, housing, water supplies, etc. Scores of NGOs respond to these emergencies and together provide the practical assistance needed. Once essential services are being supplied satisfactorily, it is often these same NGOs that seek to widen the scope of their work to answer long-term refugee needs. Social or community development workers and specialists are recruited both externally and locally to complement the work of an expatriate relief team, whose presence gradually becomes unnecessary. At the same time NGOs concerned solely with emergency relief give place to others that concentrate on development projects.

These NGOs operate independently, albeit within the guidelines formulated by the host government and the UNHCR. Although the latter is often the main source of project financing and provides some basic infrastructural support, the numerous agencies working within a large refugee assistance programme have only very loose ties to national or other institutions. These NGOs, which may originate from several different countries and employ staff of various nationalities, bring with them their own development philosophies. Within very broad limits, they are free to design and develop projects that conform to their own, often very disparate, approaches, aims, work methods and expertise. The size and capacities of the NGOs, their funding sources, range of experience, competence and the emphasis they place on different areas of work can vary enormously.

Agricultural programmes for refugees vary both in scale and in operating methods. But almost all NGO non-farm projects are small-scale and, with large refugee populations to cover in many scattered camps, a host of small income-generation projects burgeon, implemented by a score or more of NGOs and dependent in the main on short-term funding.[4] Experience has shown that there is little effective co-ordination between agencies, considerable duplication of effort, and relatively little sharing of information and experience, even among those working in the same camp. As a result, there is little coherence or systematic planning of assistance, especially of vocational training programmes. Where large-scale comprehensive training programmes exist, they are generally geared to the provision of health facilities and primary education or to meeting other basic needs, rather than employment or income generation. National vocational training institutions in the host countries seldom have the means to meet the needs of refugees, at any level.

Where countries host a refugee population of several hundred thousands, only a limited amount of land (on a per capita basis) can be made available to the refugees for agricultural use. The search for a durable solution therefore depends to a large extent on the creation of self-employment schemes for the majority of refugees who live in crowded camps

[4] The UNHCR, on which many are dependent, has an annual funding cycle.

located in remote areas and further isolated by poor national infrastructure.

Consequently, aid agencies have concentrated on the development of artisanal skills which serve the refugee community while providing employment; and, to a far lesser extent, on small industries linked to farming and non-farming activities for both men and women. These efforts have met with limited success. A refugee community can support only a certain number of artisans, while the numerous difficulties facing the development of rural-based enterprises in African countries are compounded by those specific to refugee conditions. Settlements are generally far from markets and sources of raw materials, and transport facilities are poor and costly. The refugees' own purchasing power is limited, while production of basic goods faces competition from those imported or locally made, or even distributed free to refugees: in Somalia, for example, those assisted by aid agencies to set up in business as soap producers and cobblers found that the bottom dropped out of their camp-based market whenever soap and shoes were distributed to refugees.

The aid agencies and the services they provide have in many instances created far more opportunities for income earning than the projects designed to promote self-employment. In one camp in Somalia in 1984, for example, approximately 2,000 refugees (out of an estimated population of 30,000) were employed by a variety of agencies and institutions for the delivery of health and education services, food handling and distribution, construction, reforestation, and as watchmen, storekeepers and cooks. Only half that number (920) were being assisted through agricultural and non-agricultural income-generating projects (of these 47 per cent were women and 53 per cent men).[5]

Programmes for urban refugees have also found it difficult to provide access to regular sources of income that could replace refugees' dependence on monthly allowances. Employment opportunities are few in countries which have high unemployment rates, particularly if the refugees do not speak the local or official language, and only a small number have become successfully employed. Access to national training institutions is severely limited, and non-existent for women who have children to care for, while language training has not reached those who most need it – again, particularly women.

The dependent attitude of the refugees themselves is a major obstacle to the development of self-reliance schemes. Few projects can provide a substitute for the perceived security or the real value of regular cash or food aid, particularly if some surplus food is received which can then be sold or exchanged for other necessities. Refugees have usually lost all or most of their possessions and have exposed themselves to great danger in order to reach their place of refuge: in their alien environment, they have no security

[5] The percentage of women participants is unusually high as this was the location of an ILO project which worked solely with women refugees.

beyond the aid they receive. Projects that aim to reduce their dependency by providing self-employment require the refugees to relinquish, at least partially, their secure subsistence base of aid in exchange for activities that involve considerable risk-taking.

In the majority of income-generating projects, the implementing agency and the refugees do not, therefore, share the same long-term objective. The refugees need and want the income a scheme may provide, but they do not want to endanger their continued supply of food aid or regular cash allowance as a result of what is perceived by them as *an additional* income; whereas the aid agency seeks, by implementing the scheme, to create conditions where refugees are less reliant on aid and accept the income, in part at least, as *an alternative.*

Thus urban refugees will apply for the formal education or training courses that guarantee them an allowance while they are trainees, but revert to dependence on a reduced allowance once they have completed the course, rather than seek employment or self-employment that would end this regular financial support. Camp refugees remain extremely secretive about their earnings and resources, and may even withdraw from a project if they believe that their participation might prejudice their eligibility for aid.

The temporary and insecure state of refugees encourages them to make the maximum use of whatever aid resources are available, and to deny whenever possible the ability to support themselves. This attitude is further encouraged by the fact that refugees, and most particularly women, are seldom involved in the major decisions that regulate their lives. They are powerless and forced to remain passive in matters that most affect them. They are recipients and, as such, can afford to take only a short-term view.

These factors, together with the objective fact of the temporary nature of being a refugee (no matter how long this "temporary" state may last), must influence the training and assistance given to women for gainful employment. Vocational training programmes for refugee women will of necessity be affected by their short-term view.

4. Some examples of failure and success

A review of selected income-earning or employment-creation projects for refugee women reveals a discouraging picture. Urban projects have centred mainly on business creation through the provision of loans. Of three such projects reviewed (in Kenya, Lesotho and the Sudan) only a small-scale enterprise programme in Port Sudan has sought to assist women household heads as a primary target group and considered the very small and limited businesses women engage in as worth supporting and improving. The loan schemes in Kenya and Lesotho, which had male entrepreneurs as their primary target group, were unsuccessful in assisting women. In fact, women with families were generally not considered creditworthy. The constraints

these women faced were in part recognised, but more importantly refugee women's skills and backgrounds were judged as *not* conforming to those of the "ideal entrepreneur" most likely to succeed in business. As a consequence, project evaluations recommended that rather than promote opportunities for women in the mainstream business creation schemes, more welfare-oriented income-generating projects should be carried out instead, in semi-sheltered environments, to enable women household heads to earn a small income to supplement their allowances. In both cases handicraft production was singled out as probably the most suitable way for women to earn this income.

There are important differences between the scheme in Port Sudan and those in Lesotho and Kenya. In the Port Sudan programme not only were the loans (often very small) carefully geared to the absorptive capacity of the women's existing businesses but the business management training was particularly suitable for illiterate women who had little time to attend counselling or training centres and who also faced social constraints in visiting public places unattended. Trained female staff, who spoke the refugees' own languages and were often refugees themselves, made regular home visits, frequently after working hours, to female borrowers during the loan repayment period; they helped the women to prepare their monthly accounts, to analyse the profitability of their business and production costs (stressing the need to include the cost of their labour time). They did not request women to visit the programme's offices; and staff actively sought out potential women beneficiaries and often made unsolicited calls to explain the kind of help the programme could offer.

In contrast, in the loan schemes provided under the Kenya and Lesotho projects the refugee women were expected to take the initiative and visit counselling offices to request assistance. Formal institutions such as banks were included in the programme's structure but their lending procedures were such that loans for women's business ventures were usually not thought worth considering. The limited extension services provided did not differentiate between the needs of men and women, and training took place in workshops or formal courses which women found it impossible to attend, owing to lack of time and child-care facilities. A proposal had been made, however, to establish a refugee training centre in Kenya including accommodation for trainees and their families. If child-care facilities had also been provided, at least one of the refugee women's practical problems would have been solved. Similarly, the proposed training of homogeneous groups in this centre, with curricula geared to their specific needs, would have made it possible to design training suited to poorly educated or semi-literate women.

Most projects have tended to underestimate the entrepreneurial capabilities of women (particularly those with family responsibilities). And while they have identified many of the practical problems that prevent women from engaging single-mindedly and uninterruptedly in self-

employment or wage employment, they have failed to tackle them. Instead they have required women to conform to work routines that generally only men are in a position to comply with – and when this did not work, have in most cases proposed, as the only alternative, welfare-oriented strategies which seldom lead to economic self-reliance.

Assistance in holding camps, such as those in Somalia or Djibouti, or in semi-agricultural settlements such as those in Zaire, has similarly not addressed the underlying difficulties that most women face when they try to earn an income. The Family Life Programme in Somalia is an example of one of the most comprehensive efforts to assist women refugees, with special training being given to more than 200 suitably educated young refugee women who subsequently became government employees as trainers in non-formal education programmes for refugee women in the camps. Several thousand women refugees have attended the courses since they began in 1981, but the overwhelming majority of students have been young unmarried girls with no formal education, for whom the programme has provided some basic training in literacy, home-making and income-generating skills (mainly handicrafts and tailoring); a small number of graduates have been able to earn a little income in a semi-sheltered environment. Although the economic rewards for the skills taught may not amount to much, one cannot deny the value of providing vocational skills to illiterate girls too old to go to primary school. However, the required daily attendance over a period of nine to 12 months has prevented married women with children from taking part in the courses and the programme has not developed an extension service to reach women who are unable to attend.

Similarly, a programme developed by an NGO in Somalia, which provided advanced tailoring and business management courses to refugee women in camps, required the trainees to attend courses for six hours daily over a period of several months. There was only one married woman among the 50 trainees. Although credit was granted to graduates for buying sewing machines, only a few were able to find an economic niche in camp markets which were already abundantly supplied with tailors.

Lack of time is not the only factor that influences the participation of women in training schemes. Refugees engaged in an ILO soap-making project in Somalia were older women able to work at the production centre for several hours a day because their children no longer needed constant attention. But these women made it clear that they had no interest in literacy or management training. The skills training that enabled them to produce the soap was welcomed because it resulted in an income, but the women saw little additional advantage in acquiring skills to manage the production unit and, as has happened in several other instances, literate male refugees were later brought in to manage its affairs.

An ILO farming project for women (also in Somalia) showed that mothers with heavy family responsibilities managed to take up work which they valued and had requested if it was organised to fit their other activities

and brought them adequate financial returns. Irrigated vegetable growing is time-consuming, but the women were able to work their plots when it suited them (generally in the afternoon) and to bring their young children with them if necessary, while older children also helped in the work. Skills and organisational training, timed to coincide with the presence of most of the women farmers, was well received.

The experience in a Zaire settlement project was similar: women found no time to attend workshops devoted to stereotyped "women's activities" but readily reorganised their daily work schedule in order to engage in concrete activities that provided an income.

Most of the training and income-generating activities that have been developed in camps and settlements have reached very few married women or single female parents because the projects have not included arrangements for lightening their workload and child-care responsibilities or been adapted to their work routines. At the same time they have generally offered training for which an immediate use is not apparent to the women; they have often promoted activities that generate very little income and take no account of the cost to the women in labour time.

We have already looked at some of the external factors that limit the development of self-employment and small-scale enterprises in camps and settlements. Even such of these activities as exist for women, however, are based mainly on what is regarded as "suitable" work rather than what is profitable. The most extreme example of a pointless activity, perhaps, is that of a project in Djibouti, where over 100 women produced handicrafts which the project itself was obliged to buy as there was virtually no market demand. But agencies continue to teach women tailoring, hand-sewing, knitting and embroidery, and encourage traditional handicraft production, ignoring both the concrete evidence of poor marketability and the many negative experiences which have been documented. Even agricultural projects, when they are made available to women, may ignore market demand, with women being assisted to grow perishable vegetables that the local people do not eat, in locations far from regular or reliable transport services to urban markets. As for poor rural women throughout Africa, income-earning projects for women refugees must be based, first and foremost, on what is marketable and profitable, rather than on preconceived notions of what might be "suitable". At the same time women should not be offered training for "non-traditional" occupations without a clear knowledge of how they will apply the skills taught. Some experiences have been extremely disappointing: the only woman trained in a carpentry course for refugees in the Sudan was unable to find work in this field, and the NGO which trained her now has no knowledge of her whereabouts. A scheme to train six women as sewing machine mechanics in Somalia similarly led to unsuccessful results when the graduates subsequently sought employment. These experiences underscore the need for sound initial market research and employment

counselling and, while it is conventional wisdom that vocational training must be linked to employment opportunities, it is particularly important to ensure that women trained in non-traditional skills are given assistance and support to establish themselves in their new occupations.

5. Some common findings

An important first step in the design of training and income-earning schemes, therefore, is a thorough and comprehensive survey of market demand for skills, products and services. At the same time an inventory should be made of women's skills and their work experience, paid or unpaid. Most income-earning schemes for women tend to concentrate on artisanal skills at the expense of other types of work women do. In conditions where women's major productive work in agriculture and livestock raising can no longer provide a livelihood, the skills women have used in previously unpaid work may serve as an effective basis for training. By upgrading and modernising these skills, often through the introduction of new technologies, it is possible to enable women to supply paid services to the community instead of unpaid services confined to the household. At the same time, women should enjoy far greater access to the employment opportunities created in camps and settlements by government and aid agency services. Considerable experience has now been gained in determining the employment needs that arise when establishing and organising a refugee camp or settlement. An overall assessment should be made at the time of project design of the ways in which these opportunities can be made more accessible to women, with supporting schemes designed to train them in the skills that will inevitably be in demand.

Projects should also take as their starting point a thorough understanding of the needs of women for services and assistance. Most assistance to women, particularly those with children, is generally designed to meet a single need (e.g. a cash income or better nutritional knowledge), while the neglect of other needs might diminish the intended benefits. Training and assistance projects for women whose daily work encompasses a wide variety of tasks and responsibilities cannot isolate one need if they are to provide a satisfactory overall solution.

Most refugee programmes are characterised by a lack of knowledge of the female population: their skills, resources, backgrounds and needs. Until these are known, training or any other type of assistance cannot be successfully geared to meet women's needs or to use their skills and knowledge effectively. At the outset of a refugee influx, a thorough baseline survey of women refugees should be undertaken. And it must be stressed that women's needs will change: urgent survival needs will give way to others that emerge in a more stable situation. So the initial assessment will need to be updated regularly. Extension workers can be trained to carry

out this work, and the beneficiaries given an opportunity to participate throughout.

The use of female extension workers drawn from the refugee community has been found to contribute considerably to a better understanding of women's needs and their effective incorporation in the design of training and income-earning schemes. The training of these workers should be properly planned and, if necessary, provided by a national or special institution. This may require some months of daily attendance at training courses, sometimes outside the camps or settlements. As a result, it is likely that the women willing and able to be trained as extension agents will be those without family responsibilities – mainly young unmarried women who have relatively little authority in their community. The existence of women's organisations in refugee communities can help to make the work of these extension agents more effective and give them the support they need. It is preferable that these organisations, rather than male officials or outside agencies, should select the extension trainees. Indeed, it is mutually beneficial if women's extension workers are closely linked to or even incorporated in women's organisations, which should be assisted through the provision of leadership skills and resources.

The creation of women's organisations by outside agencies is more problematical, however, particularly if financial support is offered and the organisations are created after the emergency phase, when the inevitable differences in resources and status have emerged within a camp. Aid agencies should encourage the formation of women's organisations as soon as the refugees start to pour in since it is clear that if women are to have any say in the organisation of a camp or settlement and in the delivery of goods and services, they must be properly represented. More importantly, aid agencies and host government officials should be encouraged to consult women refugees when planning the organisation of structures and services.

The participation of women refugees as active decision-makers from the start also fosters a greater commitment by adult refugees to their environment, and facilitates the success of efforts to promote self-help. Most "self-help" schemes so far have been initiated by non-refugee officials or aid workers, fairly late in the establishment of a camp, and designed and implemented by newly trained male refugee community development workers. Consequently, they have generated little enthusiastic participation, particularly when the refugees are asked to provide for themselves services which they were previously paid to supply or received free.

Yet it must be recognised that although self-help schemes and a greater commitment to solving their own problems will be encouraged by the active participation of women refugees in decision-making, and as a result their needs will be better addressed, the outcome of training programmes will continue to be influenced by the temporary nature of the refugees' situation and outlook – whose long-term objectives generally bear little relation to their lives as refugees. As Christensen found in Somalia in 1981, refugees

expressed "great nostalgia for their homes and previous way of life, be it sedentary agriculturalist, urban dweller, nomad or semi-nomad".[6] And all but one of a sample of 150 households said they would return home immediately if it were possible. Thus ownership or self-management of a small-scale business (particularly if it is run by a group of women whose only bond is that they are refugees) may exist for only so long as refugees stay in the camp. Consequently, only the acquisition of the technical and managerial skills needed for production and the immediate generation of an income will be seen as useful. In this regard, the ultimate objective of self-reliance should be mutually agreed upon and the means of achieving it properly planned from the start. There should be a commitment on the part of the refugee women to participate in both technical and management training before the project is implemented. Such a commitment will be forthcoming only if the beneficiaries take part in the design of the scheme, so that the necessary range of assistance is given (including for example child-care facilities) and implementation suitably geared to women's daily work routines.

Donor assistance to refugee self-reliance programmes has generally been characterised by short-term funding which requires a maximum number of refugees to be reached in as short a time as possible – a funding philosophy geared to the initial emergency but unsuited to long-term development programmes that seek the active participation of beneficiaries at every stage of design and implementation. Donor requirements have often placed severe constraints on the types of income-generating schemes developed, and the quality of assistance offered has suffered when quantity and speedy delivery became the overriding concerns. The haste imposed by short funding cycles encourages undue emphasis on the provision of technical expertise by project staff and discourages the participation of beneficiaries, the careful gathering of data and a considered and sensitive approach to overall project implementation. The experiences in Somalia and Zaire, among others, highlight this problem: a camp development project for women refugees in Somalia was granted funds for six months to one year at a time, while short-term funding similarly hampered the long-term objectives of a settlement development project in Zaire. In both cases management training for women suffered from the short time allowed for project implementation, so that the long-term sustainability of the activities established was not ensured, and this in turn affected the potential replicability of the schemes. In contrast, the Port Sudan Small-Scale Enterprise Programme, whose training and loan schemes for illiterate women have achieved considerable success, provided for sufficient time to gather the necessary data for planning its interventions and allowed six months for intensive staff training before the project was implemented and the first loan application approved.

[6] H. Christensen: *Survival strategies for and by camp refugees* (Geneva, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 1982).

Funds granted for non-agricultural income-earning schemes have also tended to be small in relation to needs. Funds for women's activities are often earmarked as small allocations within the total amount made available for larger projects aimed at male-headed families. As a result, women's income-earning projects have tended to be undercapitalised, and this has further encouraged the concentration on activities that require little capital outlay, provide minimal skills and incomes, and have no potential for ensuring even a measure of self-reliance.