

Local Integration and Local Settlement of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and Refugees: A Conceptual Analysis

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Abstract

This paper inspects the role of local integration and local settlement as a means of addressing and finding durable solutions to the problems of human displacement and settlement. Initially, an attempt is made to define the concepts of local integration and local settlement, as well as their relationship to each other. One of the “durable solutions” promoted by UNHCR in protracted situations is local integration, where refugees are offered permanent asylum and integration into the host society by the host government. This paper will seek to examine and highlight the role of local integration as a durable solution to refugee influxes in countries of first asylum and that of IDPs who are self-settled in host societies. It concludes that local integration is actually not a forgotten solution, but one that is unrecognized and not much practiced. It is also suggested that local integration has great potential as a solution where repatriation or resettlement are not viable options; particularly in protracted refugee situations. The paper uses existing research literature and evaluation reports, available from UNHCR and other depositories such as the Refugee Studies Centre at Oxford University. The paper goes on to suggest that voluntary repatriation is not an immediately attainable solution for many of the world’s refugees or IDPs, nor is it necessarily the most viable one. On the basis of this analysis, the paper concludes that a comprehensive strategy is required to effectively address and resolve problems of refugees and of IDPs, involving a revitalized approach to local integration, local settlement and the promotion of self-reliance.

Key words: local integration, settlement, displacement, durable solution, refugees, IDPs.

Introduction

One of the most significant problems in the past few decades for refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) living in first asylum countries or places of residence, is that return is not an early possibility. In most cases, some spontaneous repatriation occurs, followed by new outbreaks of violence. Consequently, refugees or IDPs flow across the border but are unable to return to live securely in their homelands for many years. In some cases, repatriation does occur for large numbers of refugees, but some are unable or unwilling to return for a variety of reasons.

In protracted situations, refugees and IDPs spend years living in border zones or with host communities. Many reside in camps, or other unsatisfactory and unsafe circumstances, with few means to support or educate themselves and their children. The legal status of refugees in the host country is uncertain; they are not granted full asylum, nor are they likely to be resettled in a third country or other place of residence. There are numerous cases of refugees and IDPs living in protracted situations, including Bhutanese, Chinese, Salvadorans, Iranians, Laotians, Malians, Mauritians, Nicaraguans, Sri Lankans, Togolese, Turks, Yemenis and Yugoslavs (Brun, 2003; Wanninayake, 2019).

This paper seeks to examine and highlight the role of local integration as a durable solution to refugees in countries of first asylum and IDPs who are self-settled in host societies. Although local integration has

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been termed a “non-solution”², examples are in fact numerous enough to be worthy of synthesis. This paper seeks to provide an inventory of local integration case studies from all continents. It must be noted that each local integration process has had varying degrees of success, but an in-depth analysis and evaluation of each is beyond the scope of this paper. The inventory aims to provide a crucial starting point for further research into local integration, and its future role in international refugee and IDP policy.

This paper uses existing research literature, case studies and evaluation reports, available from UNHCR and other depositories such as the Refugee Studies Centre at Oxford University. The literature was supplemented by other scholars who have done extensive relevant studies in the particular field.

Concept of Local Integration

Local integration is generally referred to as one of the three ‘durable solutions’ available to refugees; the others being voluntary repatriation to the country of origin and resettlement in a third country. Strictly speaking, it can be argued that the process of local integration becomes a durable solution only at the point when a refugee becomes a naturalized citizen of his or her country of asylum, and consequently is no longer in need of international protection (Brun, 2003; Crisp, 2004). Nevertheless, local integration as a durable solution comes together with three dimensions. Initially, it is a legal process, whereby refugees reach a wider range of rights in the host state. Next, it is an economic process of establishing sustainable livelihoods and a standard of living comparable to the host community. Finally, it is a social and cultural process of adaptation and acceptance that enables the refugees to contribute to the social life of the host country and live without fear of discrimination (Crisp, 2004). Using a narrow conception of local integration, it could be argued that the process becomes a durable solution only at the point when a refugee becomes a naturalized citizen of his or her asylum country (Crisp, 2004).

The broader, multi-dimensional definition, however, would suggest that it is possible for a refugee to acquire the three elements of local integration without actually being naturalized. Thus, for the purposes of this paper, the process of local integration will be broadly outlined by the assumption that “refugees will remain indefinitely in their country of asylum and find a solution to their plight in that state. Ideally, but not necessarily, that will involve the acquisition of citizenship.” (Crisp, 2004.p.3).

The principle of local integration is firmly established in international refugee law. The 1951 UN Refugee Convention acknowledged the role of local integration, focusing on the importance of citizenship in achieving durable solutions. According to article 34 of the Convention, “the contracting states shall as far as possible facilitate the assimilation and naturalization of refugees. They shall in particular make every effort to expedite naturalization proceedings.”³As one scholar has pointed out, integration is a more useful term than assimilation, suggesting as it does that refugees “maintain their own identity, yet become part of the host society to the extent that host population and refugees can live together in an acceptable way.” (Kuhlman, 1994: 56). Therefore, each of the case studies looked at in this paper will involve attainment of *legal rights, economic rights* and/or *social and cultural rights* for refugees in the host country.

The difference between assimilation and local integration should be clarified. The Refugee Convention uses the concept of assimilation alongside integration. However, UNHCR endorses local integration as a

²“Although local integration is always listed among the three durable solutions, in fact it is rarely used in cases of mass influx and has, in that context, almost become a “non-solution.” NGO Statement on Local Integration - Global Consultations on International Protection 22-24 May 2002. Available at < <http://www.icva.ch/doc00000865.html>>

³Article 34 of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, adopted on 28 July 1951 by the United Nations Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Status of Refugees and Stateless Persons convened under General Assembly resolution 429 (V) of 14 December 1950; which entered into force on 22 April 1954, in accordance with article 43.

more useful term. UNHCR has stated that “the international community has always rejected the notion that refugees should be expected to abandon their own culture and way of life, so as to become indistinguishable from nationals of the host community”⁴.

UNHCR thus promotes local integration, as opposed to assimilation, as one of three ‘durable solutions’ available to refugees. In developing countries, local integration has been widely utilised although not reported to the same extent. In several countries across Africa and Asia, large populations of refugees have been successfully locally integrated, naturalised, or have been given the opportunity to achieve self-reliance as a prelude to full local integration. However, it appears that local integration has not always been a high priority within UNHCR. In 1995 for example, the organization published a book entitled ‘The State of the World’s Refugees: In Search of Solutions’, which remarkably failed to make any substantive or positive references to local integration (UNHCR, 2002).

However, during the last decade, the potential of local integration has been emphasized by its increased significance within UNHCR policy. In 2005, the organization’s Executive Committee reached a conclusion on local integration. This conclusion highlighted the importance of local integration as a burden sharing activity and clarified “UNHCR’s catalytic role in assisting and supporting countries receiving refugees...and in mobilizing financial assistance and other forms of support, including development assistance from the international community.” (UNHCR, 2007). It also outlined the need for the refugees to be prepared to adapt to their new community and promoted self-reliance as a strategy to facilitate local integration.

Durable Solutions and Local Integration

Durable solutions were developed for refugees, but may also be applied in crises of internal displacement (Bascom 1993)⁵. Since most crises of displacement, even protracted ones, are regarded as temporary, as with refugees, the most accepted solution to the IDP problem today is repatriation (Frelick 1999, Jacobsen 2001). However, because of limited prospects of safe return, repatriation is a poor alternative in many of the protracted conflicts generating internal displacement. Hence, the emphasis on repatriation as the preferred solution may create false expectations with long, frustrating and dangerous waiting games in which uprooted people insist upon their ‘right to return’ (Frelick 1999). Where repatriation is not feasible, the need for emergency relief may turn into a need for more long-term solutions like local integration. Because of the international community’s focus on repatriation, local integration has become an almost forgotten solution for refugees and IDPs, although it is a strategy commonly applied locally among many of those displaced who face protracted situations of displacement (Jacobsen 2001).

As I mentioned earlier, local integration is commonly referred to as one of the three ‘durable solutions’ available to refugees; the others being voluntary repatriation to the country of origin and resettlement in a third country. Strictly speaking, it can be argued that the process of local integration becomes a durable solution only at the point when a refugee becomes a naturalized citizen of his or her asylum country, and consequently is no longer in need of international protection. However, the definition used in this paper which emphasizes the multi-dimensional nature of local integration, casts some doubt upon such a

⁴UNHCR, (2002). “4th Meeting: Global Consultations on International Protection” EC/GC/02/6, 25 April 2002.

⁵The Guiding Principles on internal displacement state that return to their homes, integration where they currently reside, or resettlement in another part of the country are the main solutions to the IDP problems.

restrictive interpretation of the concept. It is quite possible for a refugee to acquire and exercise a wide range of rights, to become entirely self-reliant and to develop close social ties with the host country and community, without becoming a naturalized citizen of the asylum state. In such circumstances, it would be pedantic to suggest that such a person had not attained a very real degree of local integration.

For refugees, local integration takes place through a process of legal, economic, social and cultural incorporation, followed by the offer of citizenship and the cessation of their refugee status (Kibreab 1989). However, for IDPs the issue may be more complex, because there is no obvious point at which their status as IDPs ends. Relatively little work has been done and no general guidelines developed as to when the status of internal displacement should end. According to Karanian (2002), until recently there has not been a pressing need to consider cessation issues, or to consider how the criteria for cessation of status for refugees might be analogous to the criteria for IDPs.

In general, there is a strong case to be made for the argument that internally displaced persons do not necessarily have to return to their original place of residence in order to find a solution to their plight. The view seems to have been that as long as IDPs benefit from the protection of the state and are able to enjoy a satisfactory degree of physical, material and legal security through local integration processes in the location where they have settled, then that may be considered as a solution and an end to displacement (UNHCR 1997).

One of the “durable solutions” promoted by UNHCR in protracted situations is local integration, where refugees are offered permanent asylum and integration into the host society by the host government. As set out in international refugee conventions, local integration refers to the granting of full and permanent asylum, membership and residency status, by the host government. It takes place through a process of legal, economic, social and cultural incorporation of refugees, culminating in the offer of citizenship (Kibreab 1989: 469). Refugees with this status enjoy a range of human and civil rights, often referred to as ‘refugee rights’, which are set out in the 1951 Convention and other international instruments, and include the right to marry, to practice one’s own religion, to own property, to work and seek employment, and to have access to education and housing. Under these circumstances refugees have once again acquired the protection of a state, and are no longer refugees.

During the Cold War, permanent asylum and local integration were widely practiced particularly in asylum countries in the West. In developing countries, the full offer of permanent asylum and integration was less widely implemented. Many host governments, particularly in Africa, permitted refugees to settle amongst the local host community without official assistance – a practice known as self-settlement. However, the legal aspects of local integration, which require that refugees be granted full refugee status, permanent residency and other human and civil rights, were seldom granted by host governments in developing countries.

The guarantee of local integration applies to relatively few refugees in protracted situations in recent history. Since the end of the Cold War, the likelihood that host governments will offer refugees permanent asylum and integration into the host society has become increasingly small.

In developing countries, host governments tend to view refugees living in border zones as *prima facie* refugees, because they have not undergone determination procedures and therefore do not have full refugee

status⁶. Most refugees in these countries never become Convention refugees and do not experience the rights and privileges of Convention refugees, nor are they ever likely to be legally integrated into the host country. (Indeed, in many host countries, some of these rights are not even in place for the local population.)

By contrast, UNHCR regards *prima facie* refugees as refugees in every sense of the word, and entitled to all the rights offered by the 1951 Convention, including local integration. In recent years, even the practice of allowing self-settlement has been restricted, and only a small number of governments, including Uganda, Mexico and Belize, have offered refugees who cannot or do not wish to repatriate the opportunity for local integration. In both developed and developing host countries, the preference is for temporary protection and restrictions on refugees, including encampment, until repatriation takes place. Local integration, with its connotation of permanence, has fallen out of political favor, and the term is now a loaded one arousing negative reactions among host governments and donor agencies alike.

In the West, the reasons for this trend in the treatment of refugees reflects the shifting politics of asylum since the end of the Cold War (Frelick 2001). In developing countries, this shift occurred partly as a follow-on to the West's new reluctance to support local integration, and also because the presence of refugees was becoming increasingly problematic for host countries. Refugees were increasingly associated with security problems like the militarization of camps, the spill-over of conflict from their countries of origin, and increased criminal activity. In addition, refugees were seen to impose economic and environmental burdens on the host community, and were blamed for a variety of social ills and problems affecting the local population in the host area of residence. In these circumstances, host governments sought to impose restrictions on refugees, and began to insist that they stay only temporarily. Protracted situations are characterized today by a 'care and maintenance' or 'warehousing' model of refugee assistance in countries of first asylum.

Host governments, UNHCR, donor governments and international agencies have with a few exceptions, been unimaginative in their response to long-term refugee populations. There is no vision that refugees and assistance programs could be a development asset to countries of first asylum, or that they could promote human security there. This failure to look for more creative and positive approaches to protracted refugee situations represents an extraordinary waste of resources. As Jeff Crisp, a UNHCR officer once remarked, "It doesn't make sense to confine refugees to camps and to insist that they survive on food-aid when agricultural and income-generating opportunities are waiting to be exploited" (Crisp, 2004.p. 4).

How refugees in protracted situations should be settled and assisted in host countries is one of the challenges facing the international refugee regime. The problem is not simply how best to help refugees, but, given the climate of restrictive and temporary asylum, it is about how to find solutions that are acceptable to host countries – for without the host country's acquiescence and active involvement it will be much more difficult to help refugees. In many ways, it is as important to focus on the needs and constraints of host countries and governments as much as on those of refugees.

⁶Those referred to as Convention refugees are those who have undergone full determination procedures and have formal refugee status in the host country. Their numbers tend to be much smaller. Even those who have undergone full determination and have legal refugee status, may find their actual rights and residence status to be insecure and incomplete.

Concept of Local Settlement

While local integration can be regarded as a process that leads towards a durable solution for refugees, the notion of ‘local settlement’ is best defined as a strategy for dealing with mass refugee movements. It was experienced most widely between the 1960s and 1980s, at a time when Africa and other developing regions were experiencing a growing number of large-scale refugee influxes (UNHCR, 2007). Responding to these influxes, host governments recognized the new arrivals on a prima-facie basis and provided them with land where they could establish new settlements, engage in farming and other economic activities. While the international community was expected to support such refugees for an initial period, it was assumed that they would eventually attain self-sufficiency, enabling their settlements to be ‘handed over’ from UNHCR to the authorities of the host country (UNHCR, 2007).

This approach to the problem of mass refugee influxes was acknowledged in the 1967 Refugee Convention, which says that member states “shall use their best endeavors consistent with their respective legislations to receive refugees and to secure the settlement of those refugees who, for well-founded reasons, are unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin or nationality.” The relationship between the concept of local integration and that of local settlement is a somewhat ambiguous one, complicated by the tendency of some commentators to use them interchangeably.

Local settlement, however, does not assume that refugees will find a durable solution in their country of asylum. In some instances, locally settled refugees or IDPs might indeed remain in exile, becoming progressively integrated there in legal, economic and social terms. But in other instances, local settlement might be a temporary phase, allowing refugees or IDPs to live with a degree of dignity, security and prosperity, until such time as they are able to benefit from the solution of voluntary repatriation (Brun, 2003).

Local integration, Benefits and Burden

Local integration is a process that has many potential benefits for both the refugees and the host community. While huge refugee influxes have often been termed a “burden” by host countries, they also offer a great opportunity for economic development. The refugees constitute a new labour-force with skills that can be utilized to benefit the host community by developing under-populated areas. Seen in Tanzania with the influx of Burundian refugees in 1972, the development of land for farming in the country’s remote Western periphery enabled the refugees to contribute substantially to the local and national economy. Hosting refugees can also result in the long-term benefits of access to new infrastructure. The building of roads, schools and hospitals financed by international refugee aid are permanent and usually open to refugees and locals alike (Black and Sessay 1997; Leach 1992).

The hosting of refugees can also be a show of goodwill, solidarity, and burden-sharing. It can provide host governments with international aid, whilst bolstering their status as a responsible member of the international community. Thus, the political motivations for refugee-hosting should not be overlooked. The notion of local integration also holds additional appeal for those who believe that keeping refugees in camps violates their rights. Freedom of movement and the right to work are two fundamental human rights that are often denied to refugees confined to camp situations, sometimes for years on end.

Some studies (Brun 2003; Wanninayake, 2017) argue that integration into the host community can be very effective for both refugees and their hosts, but they argue that this tends to relate only to the specific contexts where the population density is relatively low, implying a labor shortage, where the refugees or IDPs belong to the same ethno-linguistic group as their host community, or where there has been a history

of displacement between the original villages and the host communities. In these situations, the refugees or IDPs are able to build adequate livelihoods without generating unnecessary competition with the host community. However, some studies have shown that integration into an urban area or the most popular places is often less successful, both for the displaced people and the hosts. This is particularly applicable to places where there is a lack of resources and livelihood struggles occur and where the administration of the host community imposes administrative rules which hamper livelihood opportunities for refugees /IDPs (Black and Sessay 1997; Wanninayake, 2017).

On the other hand, the perceived benefits of regular aid and relief of food and other goods and assistance in the welfare centers can motivate envy in poor host communities (Lawrie and van Damme 2003; Brun 2003). Economic suffering among the IDPs is a related concern in many cases of the IDPs settlement in the host communities. Lack of access to arable land is a recurrent factor undermining the livelihoods of displaced people among the hosts. In rural reception areas, this is sometimes mitigated by the capacity of local social and economic structures to provide alternative access to land or other productive resources (Leach 1992; Wanninayake, 2017).

Moreover, some studies have argued that regardless of whether displaced people are in camps or settled with the host people, the host regions administratively, often consider that the result of refugee or IDP settlement is ripe with challenges, such as excessive resource demands and associated environmental degradation, as well as security threats (Jacobson 2002). A potential lack of access to formal employment may result in the ‘refugees/IDPs’ involvement in the informal sector or illicit activities such as sex trade or drugs. Hence, the innovative livelihood strategies of the displaced people (rather than any “dependency pattern”) may become the cause of host community opposition (Jacobson 2002; Kibreab 2003). The potential impact on the livelihoods of the poorer hosts was raised two decades ago by Chambers (1986), who emphasized the particular dangers in land-scarce, labor-abundant regions. A study by Whitaker (2002) on refugees in western Tanzania emphasizes the significant diversity of experience, in terms of impact on the host livelihoods, showing that the host experiences are strongly influenced by their gender, age, class, settlement patterns, the local socio-economic situation, and host-refugee relations.

Refugees and IDPs who are among the host communities generally survive by sharing the food and resources with the host communities and taking advantage of the income generating opportunities that exist in the host community. This positions the host families and the host community’s work as an informal instrument of a humanitarian aid agency or NGO, by saving lives, building flexibility, and providing necessary services. Increasing the support to host families and host communities through suitable and targeted programs, can ease the burden of hosting by enhancing their flexibility, decreasing possible tensions, and helping the IDPs to survive. In contrast, it is important to identify when hosting may distort the refugees or IDPs and their hosts’ livelihood strategies and coping mechanisms and consider ways to avoid this.

The concept of local integration also holds additional appeal for those who believe that keeping refugees in camps violates their rights. Freedom of movement and the right to work are two fundamental human rights that are often denied to refugees confined to camp situations. Resistance to the local integration of refugee populations is seen amongst host governments and locals alike, with opposition being based on a number of contributory factors, both real and perceived. Refugee camps have experienced direct attacks and militarization has sometimes become acute. Petty and organized crime has indeed flourished in some refugee hosting areas (Crisp 2004). These real and perceived security threats can cause resentment and clashes between locals and refugees, diminishing chances for successful local integration.

Refugee hosting can also take a toll on the environment. The increased use of natural resources in activities like charcoal making, fishing, firewood and thatch-grass selling, and the cultivation of hillsides can have a substantial impact. Refugee influxes also increase competition for land and jobs, as well as pressure on infrastructure such as schools, roads and health centres. However, the attitude of the host country is not the only obstacle to local integration as a durable solution. The blurred line between humanitarian and development aid for local integration projects has often resulted in protection ‘gaps’, where refugees are left without institutional and material support. This has, in turn, diminished the viability of local integration programmes and wider policy development.

Historically, it has proven difficult to secure funding for local integration projects. Donors are not attracted to long-term activities encompassing refugee integration, and making refugees less visible is neither psychologically nor politically satisfying to international or national organizations. Furthermore, local integration has been a difficult solution to sell to refugees that hold on to the idea of eventually returning home. Host states also hold that by limiting the potential for local settlement and integration, there is a greater chance to promote repatriation.

Although local integration is not always welcomed by host governments or local governments in theory, provincial authorities often recognize the de-facto integration of refugee or IDP populations in practice. The degree of linguistic, ethnic, and cultural similarities between the host and refugee population is a significant factor in the initiation of a local integration process (Jacobson, 2001; Crisp, 2004). In some cases, very different policies have been applied for different ethnic refugee communities within the same country. Although cultural similarities undoubtedly smooth integration, the ethnicity of a refugee population should not predicate the durable solutions available to them. The length of time a refugee or IDP population has spent in a host country or host community is another significant factor in local integration. As stated, protracted situations often seem to be the most appropriate for local integration (Brun, 2003; Wanninayake, 2017). Extended stays contribute to de-facto integration, especially through language and education assimilation. Furthermore, these adjustments, particularly strong amongst the younger generations, tend to diminish the host community dislike towards the refugees or IDPs.

Historical Development of the Concept of “Local integration”

Integration as a theoretical concept has its roots in the works of the classical sociologists, particularly in Emile Durkheim (Bulcha 1988, Bulmer 1984, Favell 1998). Durkheim’s sociology basically concerns solidarity between people (Østerberg 2001). ‘Integration’⁷ refers to the relationship between the parts in a system or whole, and solidarity between people generates groups that are more or less integrated depending on the extent to which the participants support common aims or concerns (Østerberg 1997). For Durkheim, integration or solidarity is a source of vitality because those who are integrated into the larger society gain strength through dealings with others. Integration may therefore be regarded as cementing society.

Durkheim’s work has been influential for the way we think about how migrants should become part of a society today. Within ethnic and racial studies, for example, processes of integration have mainly been studied through how immigrant groups have adapted to the host societies in American or European cities.

⁷Durkheim defined two kinds of social integration: mechanical solidarity, the sharing of similar characteristics; and organic solidarity, inter-dependence based on the division of labour. The former characterised traditional societies, while the latter characterised modern societies.

This tradition owes much to the Chicago School of Sociology for which immigration and its consequences were among the central themes. In the early twentieth century they popularised the application of the idea of integration and its use as a conceptual framework for public policies, through exploring the spatial relations between ethnic groups and their goals (Favell 1998, Tomasi 1998). Some of the most enduring themes in the Chicago School research were the dynamics between cultural preservation among immigrants versus the pull to assimilate to the host society (Miller 1997). The most commonly accepted aim was – and in many cases still is – that individuals must become part of the larger society, or the organism. One consequence of this view has been the understanding that for immigrants to be accepted in the new society they have to give up their old identities and assimilate into the new society. This view is related to the essentialist notion of place discussed above. One important contribution to this view of the immigrant as out of place was a short essay by Georg Simmel (1950) on ‘The Stranger’, an essay not necessarily about immigrants (see Allen 2000), but which has later been applied for the purpose of describing immigrants in numerous works. Robert E. Park (1928) - also a Chicago School theorist - claimed that migrants who find themselves striving to live in two diverse cultures have an unstable character.

When the international refugee regime was established some 50 years ago, the international community recognized the potential for refugee problems to be resolved by means of local integration. The 1951 UN Refugee Convention also envisaged the local integration of refugees, and in this respect drew particular attention to the role of citizenship in the search for durable solutions. According to article 34 of the Convention. “The contracting states shall as far as possible facilitate the assimilation and naturalization of refugees. They shall in particular make every effort to expedite naturalization proceedings.” While the principle of local integration may be firmly established in international refugee law, its practice has been very limited in the years since the refugee problem became a worldwide phenomenon⁸.

From the 1960s until the mid-1990s, the industrialized states generally acknowledged that the asylum seekers to whom they granted refugee status would be allowed to remain indefinitely on their territory, to acquire a wide range of rights and entitlements, and eventually to acquire citizenship. That approach has not been entirely discarded, and the option of local integration continues to be open to individuals who are recognized as refugees in the world’s more prosperous regions. During the past decade however, the industrialized states have demonstrated a growing propensity to grant limited and temporary forms of asylum to people who are in need of protection, with the expectation that those people will return to their country of origin - either voluntarily or at the request of the authorities - as soon as it is safe to do so. This approach was implemented and manifested most systematically with regard to those asylum seekers who fled from Bosnia to Western Europe during the wars in former Yugoslavia.

Elsewhere in the world, local integration has been practised even less systematically. While some notable exceptions can be found, the countries of Asia, the Middle East and Eastern Europe have not generally favoured or pursued this solution for refugee problems. Resettlement or repatriation has been – and continues to be – the norm. In Africa (and Central America) the situation has been more diverse. As indicated earlier, between the 1960s and 1980s, many African countries admitted large numbers of refugees, provided them with land and facilitated their efforts to become self-reliant. In a relatively small number of cases, the local settlement approach was a prelude to local integration, with refugees becoming citizens of the states which had granted them asylum.

⁸For an opinionated history of solutions to refugee problems, see B.S. Chimni, ‘From resettlement to involuntary repatriation: towards a critical history of durable solutions to refugee problems’, New Issues in Refugee Research, Working Paper no. 2, UNHCR, Geneva, 1999.

During the past three decades, however, such opportunities have diminished. Increasingly, refugees in Africa find themselves confined to camps or designated zones, where they are discouraged from becoming self-reliant and under pressure to repatriate, even in situations where conditions in the country of origin remain unsafe or unstable (Crisp, J. (2000). Indeed, a number of African states have acknowledged that by limiting the potential for local settlement and integration, they hope to promote the early repatriation of refugee populations (Rutinwa 1999).

Factors affecting Local Integration

The re-emergence of local integration as a durable solution cannot be attributed to a single factor. In fact, the political, economic and social conditions that allow for such a solution are many and varied. It is difficult to clearly identify specific catalysts for the local integration process, as each example seems to take place under different circumstances. What can be more readily assessed are general historical trends, political situations and global population changes.

For refugees, local integration takes place through a process of legal, economic, social and cultural incorporation of refugees, followed by the offer of citizenship and the cessation of their refugee status (Kibreab 1989). However, for IDPs, the issue may be more complex because there is no obvious point at which their status as IDPs ends. Relatively little work has been done and no general guidelines have been developed as to when the status of internal displacement should end. According to Karanian (2002), until recently, there has not been a pressing need to consider cessation issues, or to consider how the criteria for cessation of status for refugees might be analogous to the criteria for IDPs. In general there is a strong case to be made for the argument that internally displaced persons do not necessarily have to return to their original place of residence in order to find a solution to their plight. The view seems to have been that as long as IDPs benefit from the protection of the state and are able to enjoy a satisfactory degree of physical, material and legal security through local integration processes in the location where they have settled, then that may be considered as a solution and an end to displacement (UNHCR 1997).

Several developments have enabled UNHCR and the international community to take a more proactive role in protracted refugee situations in recent years. This has in turn, contributed to the re-emergence of local integration as a durable solution. Although a few new refugee emergencies have erupted in the new millennium (such as in Iraq and Darfur), the number of major refugee situations has diminished significantly. This has allowed UNHCR and others to focus more attention on previously neglected crises, especially protracted situations. Secondly, there is an accumulating body of research and evidence about the negative consequences of extended refugee hosting (Jacobson, 2001).

Refugees in camp situations are often susceptible to disease, poor nutrition status, mental health problems, and sexual and gender-based violence. In addition, these refugees are also more likely to engage in onward movements (Kuhlman, 2002). Deteriorating conditions and a lack of prospects increase the numbers leaving the camps for urban areas, or seeking asylum in more distant parts of the world. These realizations prompted further research and lobbying efforts. In 1999, UNHCR's Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit launched the 'Protracted Refugee Situations Project', which published a wide range of reports and papers on this issue. Subsequently there have been a number of internet-based initiatives set up, such as the 'Refugee Livelihoods Network' and the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants campaign against the 'warehousing' of refugees (Van Hear 2002). Research and advocacy efforts on protracted refugee situations have also increased the dialogue on alternative approaches for this particular type of refugees (Brun, 2001). As a direct result, local integration has re-emerged once again to take prominence in the

discussion of durable solutions on the international stage. This paper seeks to further promote this valuable discourse.

As mentioned, the size of the population of concern to UNHCR has declined in the last two decades. Since the spate of armed conflicts and refugee movements of the early 1990s, global refugee numbers have gone down. In particular, the number of protracted refugee situations has declined from 39 in 1998, to 30 million in 2006. The number of refugees affected has also declined from approximately 8 million at the end of 1998 to just over 5 million at the end of 2006 (IDMC 2006). Many of the conflicts at the centre of refugee crises have been brought to an end, and millions of refugees have been repatriated. In 2005 and 2006, more than 1.8 million long-term refugees returned to their country of origin, more than a million of them to Afghanistan alone. Substantial numbers were also repatriated in Africa, particularly to Angola, Burundi, Liberia and Sudan (IDMC 2006). In these cases, when a relatively small number of permanent residential refugees remain in the host country, governments are more open to their local integration (Low 2006).

With only small refugee populations remaining, competition for opportunities in the local economy and labour market is reduced. This creates an environment that facilitates the economic participation of refugees in both a local and national setting. The availability of inputs, particularly in the form of land available for settlement and farming, is another crucial factor. As seen in Tanzania and Zambia, the abundance of land for refugee settlement provided the opportunity for their self-sufficiency.

Nevertheless, since the end of the Cold War, the number of refugees has declined while internally displaced populations have increased; a trend which suggests a correlation. As flight across international borders and the right of asylum become restricted by governments as an aspect of the post-Cold War strategic withdrawal or isolationist tendency, potential refugees join the ranks of internally displaced people (IDPs). They always suffer from conditions of insecurity and destitution and are acutely in need of protection and assistance.

The durable solutions that were initiated for refugees may also be applied to the concept of internal displacement (Bascom 1993; Brun 2003). The Guiding Principles on internal displacement state that return to their homes, integration where they currently reside, or resettlement in another part of the country are the main solutions to the IDP problem. When discussing IDPs, the most accepted solution to the IDP problem is repatriation or return, since most crises of displacement, even protracted ones, are regarded as temporary (Jacobsen 2001; Duncan 2005). In many cases, such return can only occur when the causes of the displacement have been resolved. However, because of limited situations of safe return, repatriation or return is a poor alternative in many of the protracted conflict situations, which have ended in internal displacement. In fact, the emphasis on repatriation or return as the preferred solution may create false expectations. Because of the policy makers' focus on repatriation, host community integration has become an almost forgotten solution for refugees and IDPs. According to policy makers and policy-oriented studies, displacement ends when one of these durable solutions occurs and IDPs no longer have needs specifically related to their displacement. This does not mean that they may not continue to have a need for protection and assistance, but their needs would be no different from those of other similarly situated citizens (Chimni 2000). For refugees, local integration takes place through a process of legal, economic, social and cultural incorporation of refugees, followed by the offer of citizenship and the cessation of their refugee status (Kibreab 1989).

In general there is a strong case to be made for the argument that internally displaced persons do not necessarily have to return to their original place of residence, in order to find a solution to their plight. The view seems to have been that as long as IDPs benefit from the protection of the state and are able to enjoy a

satisfactory degree of physical, material and legal security through local integration processes in the location where they have settled, then that may be considered as a solution and an end to displacement (UNHCR 1997).

Significant increase in the movement of people across countries and continents must also be taken into account within the context of local integration. These developments have raised new challenges in the field of asylum and migration, in turn having an impact upon the durable solutions available to refugees and IDPs. UNHCR has reiterated that it is not a migration organization⁹, but has also recently acknowledged that refugee and migration policies should be mutually reinforcing.

There appears to be an emerging consensus concerning the ineffectiveness of policies which insist that everyone should live in their country of origin and, if they have been forced into exile, return to that country. In protracted refugee situations, it is in fact often the case that the people concerned have never lived in their putative 'homeland'. For example, 85 percent of the registered '1972' Burundian refugees in Tanzania were born and grew up in the host state. In this context, local integration becomes the most forward-thinking and realistic refugee solution. Continued globalization is a relevant factor that appears to be finally creeping into policy-makers' agendas. Mixed movements of refugees and other migrants have distorted the distinction between refugees and migrants in public and political opinion. In addition, refugee movements can over time become secondary, mixed or irregular movements. There has been recognition that it would be unwise to continue to confine durable solutions to the concept that the mobility of refugees would represent a failure for local integration processes. Several examples of displacements and local integration processes can be identified.

Case of African refugees: Africa was home to approximately 9,753,000 people of concern to the UNHCR in 2007/8. It is a region that has been plagued by armed conflict since the de-colonization period of the 1960s, and subsequently by civil war and violent ethnic battles. These conflicts, in addition to famine and other problems, have resulted in massive refugee movements across, and beyond the continent. Nonetheless, Africa has also shown some of the most open borders and welcoming policies towards refugees anywhere in the world. The case studies for local integration in Africa are numerous, and provide some examples of the benefits of refugee hosting. The success of the local integration programmes of the past, may also provide a valuable opportunity to promote local integration as a durable solution for those currently displaced.

Case of Angola - Congolese refugees: Angola has hosted a population of over 13,000 refugees who fled the Democratic Republic of the Congo following the violence of a secessionist movement in 1977. The refugees were given land in non-urban areas to settle and cultivate. They have since attained a considerable degree of socio-economic integration, and are largely self-sufficient. On February 15 2006, Angolan authorities made an announcement of their commitment to finalize a local integration policy for the Congolese. They have indicated the possibility of residency rights as a prelude to full legal local integration for the 90% of refugees who have indicated they would choose to remain indefinitely in Angola.

Case of IDPs in Sri Lanka: In the case of IDPs in Sri Lanka in the post conflict situation, many factors had influenced the integration of displaced persons to the host community/area. Among those factors the more important ones are, employment opportunities, education of children, housing, political representation and participatory activities that facilitate representation and participation in host community affairs. In addition, safety, security and protection also assume rightful importance. The Sri Lanka government implemented an

⁹UNHCR, (2007). Discussion Paper: Refugee protection and durable solutions in the context of international migration, UNHCR/DPC/2007/Doc. 02. (UNHCR: Geneva)

accelerated program to return and /or resettle the IDPs housed in May 2010, the Sri Lankan President claimed in a TV interview that 90% of IDPs had been resettled and the remaining 10% were due to be resettled by the end of that year.³ By 2 January 2012, Sri Lanka government official statistics said 236,429 IDPs had been returned or resettled in their places of origin with integrating host community people¹⁰. The closed Manik Farm camp on 25 September 2012, after the last batch of IDPs had been settled in Mullaitivu district in Northern Sri Lanka. With this, the Sri Lankan Security Forces Commander and Competent Authority for IDPs in the northern region claimed that ‘there will be no more IDPs in the country’ (Daily Mirror.lk, 25 Sept 2012). Many international agencies, including the UN agencies, USAID (defence.lk 5/16/2012) and several other bilateral donor agencies applauded the GoSL’s efforts in demining and resettling IDPs, saying they were unparalleled by any other nation in history.

‘Local integration’ may both be an outcome and a process of change, that involves both the displaced populations and their hosts. According to Jacobsen (2001), to understand local integration processes the following dimensions should be explored: the policy environment and the willingness of key groups in the host country to accept the displaced people; livelihood opportunities of hosts and displaced; and the relationship between hosts and displaced people.

Conclusion

This study will provide a background and basis for advocacy to contribute to the active promotion of local integration in the future. These examples represent a range of different circumstances and differing approaches towards, and results of, local integration. The paper outlined the local integration initiatives and prospects in different country settings. What remains to be analyzed are the similarities between the case studies, in order that future opportunities for pursuing this durable solution might best be seized. Further research is required into the conditions necessary for the local integration of refugee populations to become both viable and utilized.

However, in some cases there refugees / IDPs have attained a degree of self-sufficiency, de-facto integration, or even full de-jure integration in the form of naturalization and citizenship. What is clear is that local integration has indeed been pursued and successfully implemented in numerous countries across several continents. This strongly contradicts claims that local integration is a “non-solution” that has very rarely been used as a durable solution, as suggested by a council of NGOs in 2002¹¹.

It also exhibits the latent ability of such a strategy in solving present and future refugee crises. Having catalogued the use of local integration in refugee settings over the past fifty-years, the previously undocumented successes and largely unrecognized potential need to be capitalized upon. It is apparent that the current policy focus on repatriation is not a viable solution for a large number of refugees today, and resettlement is an option available to a very small minority. Therefore, it is logical for local integration to be more widely encouraged and pursued. Protracted refugee situations are in particular in need of a fresh and new approach as it is acknowledged that long-term care-and-maintenance programmes bring few lasting benefits to host countries, donor states or to the refugees themselves (Crisp, 2004).

A number of case studies have shown that as a prelude to naturalization, local integration, local settlement, and self-reliance can be considered an appropriate and viable means of addressing the plight of long-term refugees. Thus, the opportunity now exists to further strengthen the re-emergence of local integration as a

¹⁰ Ministry of Resettlement, Sri Lanka, <http://www.resettlementmin.gov.lk>.

¹¹ NGO Statement on Local Integration Global Consultations on International Protection 22-24 May 2002. Available at <<http://www.icva.ch/doc00000865.html>>.

multitude of factors facilitate its revival. The international community, donors and host states today hold both the ability and, to an increasing extent, the will to pursue this durable solution for the benefit of millions across the globe.

Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that refugees who enjoy a high degree of legal, economic and social security in their country of asylum, are better equipped for the task of return and re-integration than those who have been warehoused in camps for many years. In this respect, the resources that are required to promote local settlement and self-reliance in countries of asylum should be regarded not as an expense, but as an investment in both local development and in regional peace building.

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