

INFOCUS PROGRAMME ON CRISIS RESPONSE AND RECONSTRUCTION

Working Paper No. 12

**WITH AN EYE TO THE FUTURE:  
ILO REFUGEE PROGRAMMES IN  
AFRICA**

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International Labour Office  
Geneva

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Recovery and Reconstruction Department

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## Preface

Refugees, returnees and internally displaced people constitute a critical target group for humanitarian, reintegration, reconstruction and development assistance. Thus in addition to UNHCR and other humanitarian actors, the ILO has also focused on this group in a number of its crisis response interventions since the 1980s. In doing this, ILO has emphasized areas that fit into its comparative advantage such as skills training, job promotion and reduction of vulnerability and poverty.

This report, prepared by Eve Hall, provides a concise analysis of some ILO efforts in this area in Africa. It throws light on the approaches adopted, the specific refugee groups targeted, impact achieved and lessons gathered. It has been undertaken to guide current and future ILO work as well as that of other bodies on this issue. Analysis of other past ILO assistance programmes for refugees in Central America and Asia will also be undertaken to add to this effort to revive the Organization's institutional memory regarding this group and to demonstrate the Organization's niche in this area. Additionally, the insights should be invaluable in guiding the follow-up to the recently established ILO-UNHCR partnership through technical cooperation.

The analysis was undertaken for the current ILO InFocus Programme on Crisis Response and Reconstruction. The overall goal of this InFocus Programme is to develop the ILO's coherent and rapid response to the different crises – natural disasters, armed conflicts, financial and economic downturns and difficult political and social transitions – focusing on areas of ILO's comparative advantage. Knowledge development constitutes one of the Programme's four main pillars. The other three are timely needs assessment and programme formulation and implementation in the crisis-affected countries; advocacy at the international, regional and national levels on the employment and other socio-economic dimensions of crisis and the need to address them as an integral component of crisis prevention, resolution and post-crisis reintegration, reconstruction and development processes; and capacity building of the ILO and its constituents to enhance their effective and active role in crisis response. The Programme's implementation is currently quite advanced in all four areas.

I wish to thank the following for facilitating this study: Ken Andoh (the Director of the ILO Area Office in Pretoria) and his staff; Judica Amri-Makhetha (ILO Multi-Disciplinary Team in Harare); and others within and outside the ILO. Finally I enjoyed the opportunity of working with Eve Hall again after our initial contact many years ago in an ILO refugee project in Somalia.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## The ILO and refugees

In the last two decades of the 20th century the ILO was an energetic actor in providing technical assistance to refugees, displaced people, and others affected by conflict in Asia and Africa, and most particularly to those who had fled to Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan and the frontline countries bordering South Africa and Namibia. In specially designed projects and programmes, ILO provided technical assistance not only in the immediate context of exile and displacement, but with a view to the longer term, by providing training to develop technical and organisational skills that would also assist refugees when they returned home.

This report draws on the experiences of three ILO programmes of assistance to refugees in Africa, implemented in Somalia, Sudan and Southern Africa in the 1980s. They initiated some innovative approaches to assistance that continue to be relevant to the rehabilitation and reintegration of refugees in the continent. The report examines how successful these programmes were in addressing employment-related social, economic and gender issues. It tries to assess to what extent they contributed to the integration of refugees in their host country, and eventually to their successful reintegration in their home country, and the lessons that can be learned from these experiences. It also includes some brief assessments by a few of the actors who benefited from or who helped to plan or implement refugee projects which had ILO support.

Ultimately, the refugee crisis in Africa demands solutions that are guided by the principle that lasting peace can only be established if it is based on social justice. The ILO's anti-apartheid programme in Southern Africa, in particular, was explicitly guided by that principle. Specific programmes of the ILO have continued to respond to crises which displace and uproot people by addressing both their immediate impact and root causes, from action to support freedom of association and expression, through to employment-intensive reconstruction and rehabilitation works, skills and entrepreneurship training and small enterprise development.

Clearly, short-term interventions need to be linked to longer-term investment in human and productive resources, most importantly by building up communities' ability to organise themselves to plan and prioritise needs and to negotiate for a greater share in decision-making with gate-keeping aid agencies. From the start of any programme, the ILO has sought to strengthen the refugees' own organisations and their organisational capacity, not only to help them make informed decisions in their country of asylum, but also where possible geared to the needs in the country where the refugees would eventually return.

In the context of the gender analysis that prevailed in the 1980s, the ILO's refugee programmes aimed to address women refugees' particular problems, and to redress in some part the generally unquestioned gender imbalance in access to training and paid employment. In Somalia, the project was implemented specifically to assist female household heads to start income earning activities, while in Sudan the project identified women headed households as a vulnerable group and designed assistance geared to the women's existing skills. In Southern Africa, action to assist women victims of apartheid was a stated objective; approximately a third of the programme's beneficiaries were women. The workshops, fellowships and training activities aimed at strengthening the organisational capacity of workers living under apartheid also included representatives of

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women workers and some activities addressed gender-specific problems, such as those faced by domestic workers.

### ***Built-in focus on human resources***

The ILO's tripartite structure encompasses work with all three main partners in national economies – governments, workers and employers. This structure leads to design of projects and programmes that can be sustained, in ways perhaps uniquely suited to the needs and the potential of societies which have been disrupted and communities displaced after major upheavals. Certainly, ILO's built-in emphasis, in every aspect of its work, on developing human resources capacity gave these programmes an immediate focus.

In the refugee programmes in East Africa for example, wherever possible programmes were grounded in national institutions or encouraged their formation, such as indigenous NGOs in Sudan and Somalia. In the anti-apartheid programme of the 1980s, ILO tried to contribute to the liberation movements' capacity to plan ahead for Southern African majority rule. It thus stressed strengthening human resources as the engine of development.

### **Refugees in Africa**

In 1981 there were an estimated five million refugees in Africa<sup>1</sup>. Over the past two decades many of those have returned home, but new conflicts have pushed out new waves of refugees, and the numbers today have not changed very much. In 2001, refugees returned home to Sierra Leone, Somalia, Eritrea and Burundi, but 4,173,000 people in Africa remained refugees, out of a total worldwide refugee population of around 12 million, while there were uncounted thousands of internally displaced people, particularly in Angola and Liberia.

Six of the 10 largest groups of refugees worldwide are from the following African countries: Sudan, Burundi, Eritrea, Angola, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Tanzania continues to host Africa's largest refugee population of almost one million people who have fled from Burundi, Rwanda and the DRC. When compared to the size of the population, however, the main refugee hosting countries are Congo (Brazzaville) with 40 refugees for every 1000 inhabitants, Djibouti (37 per 1000) and Zambia (27 per 1000).<sup>2</sup> These refugees are almost all of rural origin, farmers or pastoralists who fled *en masse* from war and physical danger, usually with no possessions beyond those they could carry.

UNHCR leads and coordinates international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems. Its mandate covers not only protection but also what it calls "The Four Rs": repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction, and "DLI": development through local integration, where refugees can settle in countries of first asylum. It is committed to ensuring the empowerment of refugee women and mainstreaming gender equality, and stresses the need to develop a gender-focused and community based approach to refugee assistance. UNHCR is both the major fund-raiser and the major donor in refugee assistance programmes. It covers a huge spectrum of needs and problems and works under enormous and constant pressure. It has one of the most urgent and complex tasks facing any of the UN agencies.

<sup>1</sup> UNHCR International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa, 1981, UN, New York.

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR website, November 2002.

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As soon as possible in any refugee situation UNHCR tries to link longer-term development to humanitarian assistance in partnership with other agencies. Approaches to this move from relief to development, which is aimed at reducing refugees' dependence on aid and finding at least a measure of self-reliance in their temporary situation, have evolved over the years, with varying degrees of success. The quality of development assistance depends largely on the capacity and expertise of the agencies (generally international NGOs) which UNHCR sub-contracts to design and implement development programmes.

Recently, there has been much focus on Quick Impact Projects, in refugee settlements to encourage self-reliance, and in reintegration programmes in the refugees' country of origin. These "QIPs" are small interventions made up of simple inputs and activities, intended to be an immediate injection of support to meet community-based needs in different sectors of assistance. Typically, QIPs relate to the building of schools or primary health clinics, rural roads or repairs of bridges. They require a one-time financial or material input by an external agency, and should then be kept going by local efforts, funds and personnel.

Because UNHCR can only assume an overall supportive and coordinating role in technical assistance programmes, it has largely relied on international NGOs from Europe, North America and South East Asian countries (particularly Japan) to design and execute projects for the transition from relief to development. Delivery by these organisations is not always of high standard. In 1983 a senior official in Sudan commented on the "great variation in efficiency, level of personnel professionalism and approach among these [non-governmental] agencies providing assistance to refugees in Sudan" and stressed that "A most serious problem facing both agency workers and the beneficiaries is that of maintaining a programme when an agency decides to leave... [There should be] special emphasis on training refugees and supporting national voluntary and refugee-based agencies".<sup>3</sup>

Almost two decades later an assessment of the repatriation programme for Mozambican refugees described a similar situation: the expertise of NGOs was not constant, and the impact of the projects they implemented often ebbed once they left, largely because the communities had no resources, human or financial, to continue them.<sup>4</sup> The question remains: how can national capacity, at the NGO and government (national and local) level, be strengthened so that they can take over where the international organisations leave off?

The search continues for innovative approaches to assistance in the circumstances particular to refugee situations, especially those in refugee settlement camps where thousands of people who have lost all material resources are concentrated. The need, as UNHCR has stressed, is to "combine efforts to come up with an innovative approach which is neither characterised as "humanitarian" nor "development" but which is *sui generis*".<sup>5</sup> The ILO programmes discussed here illustrate some approaches to refugee assistance in the move towards self-reliance which initiated action through which organisational and technical capacity can be strengthened to that end.

A basic assumption is made, when most development projects are designed a, even if this is not explicitly stated, that the social, economic and political situation in which the

<sup>3</sup> Karadawi, Ahmed "Constraints on Assistance to Refugees: Some observations from the Sudan", World Development, Vol. 11, No.6, 1983.

<sup>4</sup> Crisp, J. et al, "Rebuilding a War-Torn Society – A review of the UNHCR Reintegration Programme for Mozambican Returnees", UNHCR, 1996.

<sup>5</sup> UNHCR Mid-Year Progress Report 2002

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beneficiaries find themselves will remain fairly stable, during implementation and after. This assumption does not really hold for refugees. Above all, their future is uncertain. But what can nevertheless generally be assumed is that there will be two distinct phases for assistance: their stay as refugees in host countries, and their return to their home country. As a refugee situation unfolds, the objectives for each of these two phases could very well change, as might the relevance of projects.

External factors play a far greater role in influencing the development of refugee assistance projects than in development projects assisting nationals in relatively stable environments. In the short term, there can be sudden changes in funding and patterns of assistance to one group or another of refugees, if the host country, bilateral donor agencies or UN agencies change their policies towards assistance to a particular refugee situation. At the same time, changes in the refugees' country of origin can have a sudden and immediate effect on the situation of refugees in the host country. Coordination of assistance to refugees has always been problematic – often, far from being consulted, the refugees and the aid organisation implementing projects on the ground are the last to know about these changes.

Funding is particularly problematic for refugee assistance: not necessarily because it is difficult to secure, but because the slow bureaucratic multi-bilateral process of applying for funds is inappropriate for an emergency situation. The route from the submission of a project proposal to its approval and finally to the release of funds is, in almost any circumstances, long and tortuous. Refugee situations, however, particularly in the early stages of settlement into camps, generally demand much swifter action to respond to needs as they surface. Even when projects and funding have been approved, the slow-moving multi-bilateral machinery can delay both the initial and the subsequent periodic release of funds and seriously disrupt project implementation. When UNHCR is the source of funds, its one-year funding cycles are particularly difficult to match to the time needed to establish community-based interventions, or to collect enough information on which to design a feasible project.

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## 2. THE ILO PROGRAMMES IN SOMALIA AND SUDAN

The three ILO programmes described here have very different settings. In Somalia, the majority of refugees were women with their children and other dependents who came mainly from one region in Ethiopia, from a similar rural background, and spoke the same language. They were massed in large settlement camps, totally reliant on external aid. By contrast the refugees in Sudan were a much more heterogeneous group; they came from several countries, and were both rural and urban based. The majority of refugees covered by the ILO's anti-apartheid programme, however, unlike most refugees in Somalia and Sudan, were young people, mainly men, from Namibia and South Africa who brought no dependents with them and who had a strong organisational base in their countries of asylum.

In many ways the objectives and the contexts of these projects were fundamentally different. The anti-apartheid programme had above all a long-term view that referred to needs in the refugees' countries of origin on their return. All activities were geared to this eventuality, even when they addressed themselves to short term goals of self-reliance in the refugee situation. To that end, the projects concentrated almost entirely on skills training and not necessarily on the immediate application of these skills.

In Somalia, the project was seen entirely in the context of the need for some measure of self-reliance in a current situation of total aid, even if it was hoped that the skills learned would benefit the participants when (or if) they returned home. Towards the end of the project, plans were being formulated for the permanent integration of a significant number of refugees in their country of asylum in agricultural settlements.

In Sudan the project was shaped by a situation somewhat similar to that of Somalia. In 1981, when the ILO made its first exploratory assessment mission to Sudan, there were half a million refugees in the country. By 1985, when the ILO began implementation of an income generating programme for refugees in Eastern Sudan, the country was host to more than a million refugees, many of them Ethiopian or Eritrean. The project aimed to promote self-reliance through the development of small scale businesses in the host country considered to be increasingly urgent. But unlike Somalia the refugees were not a homogeneous group and the majority had settled spontaneously in towns. The project in Sudan worked in both rural and urban environments, covering a vast geographical area. Unlike the other two projects, it recognised that the local population was most probably as poor as the refugees who had settled near them, and included them in its different activities.

No matter how different the setting, however, each programme emphasised the development of organisational capacity, whether among the refugees themselves or the people hosting them. In the case of Somalia, this effort resulted in the formation of the country's first NGO, with founding members who were both Somali and refugees. In Namibia and South Africa, the skills acquired in exile through the ILO's anti-apartheid programme have contributed to the overall capacity of democratically elected governments and critical institutions in both countries.

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## Somalia

Between 1978 and 1981, more than half a million<sup>6</sup> people fled from the Ogaden region of Ethiopia to Somalia following a war between the two countries over the attempted secession of Ogaden, where the majority of people are ethnic Somalis. The refugees were of rural origin, mostly nomadic people, who crossed the border in mass influxes into one of the least developed countries in the world, whose population of around 5 million had already lived through two devastating droughts in the past 10 years. In 1978, Somalia's per capita GNP was \$105, and average life expectancy was 46 years.<sup>7</sup> The country could provide little for the refugees beyond land on which to erect their small plastic-sheeted bent-wood dwellings. Although the Somali government provided some scarce human and infrastructural resources, it was UNHCR's responsibility, with the assistance of other international organisations, to ensure that the refugees were provided first with the basic needs of food, water, shelter and health facilities, followed by schools and subsequently, projects to initiate the move from relief to development.

### *The setting*

The refugees were sheltered in 40 camps, with populations varying from 15,000 to 80,000 concentrated in the semi-arid rural areas of the north-west and southern regions of Somalia. Women and children initially made up 90% of these refugees, with two-thirds of households in the camps headed by women. Although from 1984 the numbers of men gradually increased, women remained in the majority. Physically crowded in cramped camp conditions, they were often socially isolated, without the support of an extended family network. Their former occupations of animal husbandry and agriculture were replaced by hours of queuing for rations. Nevertheless, in almost all camps, a women's committee was set up by the refugees themselves soon after their arrival, based on a previous quasi-political organisation in the home country, which tried to identify and where possible give some small support to families most in need. This small organisational base proved to be valuable to project staff for information, as contact points and eventually as a nucleus for the self-management of income generating and entrepreneurial activities by the refugee women.

In 1980, at UNHCR's request in the immediate wake of the last wave of refugees' arrival in the camps, an ILO consultant examined the feasibility of developing income generating activities for refugees in the camps, to contribute to initiatives aimed at lessening the refugees' total dependence on food and other aid. Given that most of the adults in the camps were women, but that almost all paid work (skilled or unskilled) was reserved for the handful of able-bodied male refugees, ILO's efforts concentrated on assisting women to help redress this gender bias. From 1981 to 1985, with core funding from the Netherlands government and additional assistance from UNHCR, the ILO implemented a technical assistance project which began as an income generating project for women refugees, and in 1983 expanded the scope of its work to become an Integrated Refugee Camp Development Project (IRCDP).

### *The Quick Impact Income Generating Project*

The activities of the ILO project, during the first two years, could perhaps be compared with those that later became known as Quick Impact Projects (QIPs).

<sup>6</sup> The exact numbers of refugees was never established and estimates ranged from 500,000 to over one million. In 1982, the number was officially set at 700,000.

<sup>7</sup> Christensen, Hanne: "Survival Strategies for and by Camp Refugees", UNRISD, Geneva 1982.

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Distribution of food rations was fairly constant but not yet fully regulated and families needed other items seldom or never supplied – matches, fresh vegetable, or soap, for example. For these, refugees bartered or sold food rations, sometimes to the detriment of a family's food supply until the next distribution. The aims of the project were to provide as many women as possible in the camps with a source of income, to increase the supply of essential goods in the camps, and to strengthen the refugees' own organisations, in this case the existing women's committees.

An international expert, together with a Somali expert seconded by UNHCR and five women assistants based in the camps launched the project in early 1981. Its main activity was the production of sleeping mats, a priority item for distribution to refugees which UNHCR was importing. By building on an existing skill, approximately 1000 women in a total of nine camps were, over a period of 18 months, provided with raw materials (palm leaf) to make traditional sleeping mats which were then bought by UNHCR for distribution to refugees. A total of 7000 mats were bought by UNHCR, at the price of \$4 each, paid to the producer. The scale of production was limited only by the supply of palm leaf, which was not constant and often in short supply.

It had been planned that only those women chosen to participate by the women's committees (women identified as particularly in need of support) would be the project's producers, that they would form a production unit in each selected camp, and receive a small regular income for regular work. But the refugee women saw the project in a different light – as a facility to which any woman could temporarily turn when she had an acute need for cash. Many more women than planned participated, taking turns to earn a little extra cash, and so adapting the project to make it more effective and relevant to real immediate needs for a larger number of people. Project staff were never able to determine exactly how many women participated, but it was clearly many more than the 600 originally identified.

At the time of implementation, the ILO project was the only one offering assistance to women for income generation in any of the 40 camps. The income from a mat was used to buy camel's milk (an important item in a Somali family's diet) or vegetables, matches, shoes or soap, and even firewood which was becoming increasingly scarce in the vicinity of the camps.

### ***The Integrated Refugee Camp Development Project***

By late 1982 the camp populations had stabilised, and the immediate emergency was over. The refugees were secure in their food and clean water supplies, in their health and education services. In almost every camp markets grew where both refugees and local people traded and provided services, generally to mutual advantage. As needs became longer term, UNHCR and its partners began to develop programmes to help refugees become less dependent on aid in their present environment, and to find alternative (or additional) economic activities to the sale and exchange of rations. With further funding from the Netherlands government, the ILO project moved from its QIP phase that covered several camps to the implementation of an Integrated Refugee Camp Development Project (IRCDP) focussing on the Jalalaqsi complex of four camps adjacent to the Shebele river in Hiran region, which accommodated a total of around 85,000 refugees.

The project's staff knowledge of the camps' economy and the refugees' survival strategies had grown considerably during the initial QIP phase. Building on this knowledge, a marketing consultant visited the camps to identify income earning opportunities: a difficult task in many ways, given the geographical isolation of the camps, the general scarcity of raw materials in the surrounding semi-desert rural areas, and the problems of communications and transport to distant urban areas. At the same time, the

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food and other commodities provided to refugees were scarce and high-value resources to the people living in those rural areas. Camp-based markets grew visibly as refugees and local residents provided a multitude of goods and services, but the lucrative sale of food rations to non-refugees kept prices for all camp-based products and services high, which could make them uncompetitive outside of a camp environment.

The IRCDP's core activities were irrigated farming, poultry keeping, and soap, chilli powder and handicraft production. The women were particularly anxious to start agricultural activities and angry that two irrigated farming projects recently initiated in the vicinity of the camps by NGOs included only male refugees. Short-term consultants were recruited by the IRCDP to teach the various production skills, while the small project staff expanded to include Somali and refugee technicians: an agriculturalist, an industrial chemist and a project manager. Market outlets outside the camps were not ruled out, but all production except handicrafts was aimed principally at the local camp market.

The 115 women who continued to produce sleeping mats and other traditional handicraft received small loans to buy their own raw materials. For all other activities, the project gave both investment and the initial working capital as an outright grant. On-going support to producers also subsumed costs, for the soap producers particularly, of transport to procure supplies and to market products, while UNHCR provided free fuel for three years for the two irrigation pumps. Almost all the women were illiterate, and uninterested in attending the literacy classes being run in all camps. Although they were enthusiastic producers, they were for many months reluctant to assume any management tasks for the different enterprises. The sense of ownership in place of dependence developed slowly.

The irrigated farming activity was the most valued by the refugee women, and it provided a meaningful income with no marketing assistance from project staff. Total income per harvest (two to three times a year) was estimated to be between US\$180 to \$220. Generally, the refugee women preferred to work individually rather than as a group: the 18 hectares allocated by camp authorities for irrigated farming, for example, were divided into individual plots on which 87 women chosen by the Women's Committee grew vegetables or maize for sale or home consumption. Even the notion of a farm management committee initially met with lukewarm response and only became active when joint action was needed to fence the land against grazing animals; later joint activities increased as the women were forced to club together to buy the pump fuel which had until then been provided free by UNHCR.

Cropping patterns changed over the seasons, and by the second year most women were only growing a few vegetables for their own consumption. As the refugees slowly began to accumulate small herds of animals (mainly goats) the women increasingly concentrated on growing maize for animal feed which could be sold at a high price. The women were selling their own produce and not very willing to reveal their income to project staff, but incomes averaged well above US\$250. By the second season, the farmers had taken responsibility for the payment of the pump operator and watchmen and bought their own seeds. A considerable number invested at least part of their earnings in the purchase of goats and sheep to rebuild their herds.

Poultry keeping was also an individual activity, with 80 women having received 10 chicks each, and subsequently making their own decisions on the use of this grant. Poultry keeping made a very small contribution to income – most women kept the chickens and eggs for home consumption. Although handicraft sales were not regular, and depended on special events (such as the Trade Fair in Mogadishu), cash return for labour time was comparatively good. The project established a small revolving fund for the producers, operated jointly by the women's committee and project staff, and of the 64 women who took small loans from the project in 1983, 47 had paid back in full and only three had

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defaulted (having left the camp without clearing their debt) when the IRCDP ended in 1984.

Small groups of women dried and pounded chili peppers for sale jointly, but income from chili powder sales was small, although there was brisk market demand - the scale of production and turnover was too small for such a low priced produce to make any meaningful impact.

Soap production was necessarily a joint effort, however, by 10 women who once they were fully trained were able to produce between 1000 and 1500 kg a month, both for sale to UNHCR for redistribution to refugees and in the local market. It was the most experimental of the activities and its experience highlights many of the difficulties that face a transition from relief to development. Most particularly, small production units of basic items with wide demand, which were the most potentially viable small enterprises, were in danger of being overwhelmed by UNHCR's own inevitably international system of procuring items of basic needs. This system unfortunately from the administrators' cost-benefit point of view, could not allow any enclaves of opportunity for local production, that could stimulate both training and income generation.

Refugees were being supplied irregularly, about twice a year, with imported soap which generally came in large consignments (and with no advance notice) that temporarily flooded the market, not only in the camps but in every town. In between these distributions refugees needed to buy soap. Most of the soap available in Somalia was imported and expensive, and locally made soap was seldom available. Small-scale production of soap therefore, had a good sales potential when it was not disrupted by aid.

This experimental soap production unit was in many ways successful – by the close of the IRCDP in 1984 the business had become financially self-supporting and was providing 10 women with incomes (on average approximately \$24 per month each) that enabled several to begin to rebuild their herds of small livestock. Producers had faced many obstacles, not least competition from UNHCR itself whenever a shipment of soap flooded all markets and sales slumped. Bulk orders were not always helpful: the Somali Prisons Department failed to pay for the 2000 kg it ordered and received. UNHCR's own organisational methods proved to be somewhat contradictory: an agreement to buy 17,000 pieces of soap over a period of six months was terminated halfway because this purchase was regarded as procurement rather than project support and had not been approved through the correct administrative structures. By 1985, however, income from soap production had become the main source of income for the producers, overtaking even income from sales of food rations. From 1985 to 1989, several more similar soap production units were initiated in other camps and operated profitably.

### ***The impact in changing conditions***

Through the 1980s, socio-economic differences among the refugees emerged fairly rapidly in many camps, for a variety of reasons. Some refugees had come with jewellery which they could sell; some female-headed families were later joined by menfolk who came with livestock. But above all, there was an unequal access to rations, the refugees' major resource. Households with many small children were generally better off than those with mainly adults (and very much more than single people) because every individual received the same amount of rations. The distribution system was rigid and inflexible – once registered (in 1981) the number of family members could not be altered, and births, deaths, departures and arrivals could not be taken into account. Thus, although there was an adequate supply of rations the distribution seemed to contribute to inequalities, and it was inevitable that certain groups acted as gatekeepers to resources and employment

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During the IRCDP's lifetime conditions in the camps changed considerably. Although the collection and sale of rations remained the subsistence base of the refugee household, small spontaneous self-employment ventures proliferated: door-to-door sales of firewood or water, shoe repairs, small shops and tearooms in the markets. NGOs in the camps supported a variety of self-employment projects – from re-forestation to skills training in tailoring - but the most significant source of employment for refugees remained the aid agencies themselves: in late 1984, up to 2000 refugee men and women were employed either part-time or full time by the aid agencies and government services in the Jalalaqsi camps (health, education, administration). The majority of employees were men, and jobs for women were generally gender-specific: food-handling, mother and child health care, tending of tree seedlings.

In comparison, only a total of 897 refugees, 492 men and 405 women, were participating in the combined income-generating projects of the five agencies operating in Jalalaqsi in the same period. Of this total, 192 were active participants of the IRCDP; a further 195 women were undertaking poultry and handicraft activities independently of the project after initial assistance.

A major problem the IRCDP faced was the time allocated for implementation and the slow process of multi-bilateral funding, which over the four years from 1981 to 1984, was divided into several “phases”, each subject to considerable bureaucratic delays. The IRCDP was initially required to achieve its objectives within 15 months, though this period was later extended to two years. The demand for quick results made the physical and logistical needs of the project disproportionately important, as staff dealt with poor infrastructural support. The need to establish each activity quickly led to an emphasis on the acquisition of technical skills, sometimes to the detriment of the organisational and managerial skills needed for successful management of small enterprises, which are in all circumstances less easily acquired.

There was one area, however, where project staff were not pushed into a hurried approach: the initial encouragement and support to help refugee women make their own decisions through their own organisational network. The initial consultative and participatory approach that led to the mat-making projects served to build an organisational basis in the camps on which new skills could be learned and other activities could be based.

“In the Somalia project a very patient approach was taken by the project team. It is conceivable that the project could have entered the refugee camp scene, drawn on the authority and organisational abilities of the Somali administrative officials, and could have “created” women’s groups...this was not done. Instead, project staff took time to talk with the women, to understand that many of them did not previously know their camp neighbours, to realise that there was often little experience of group activities. In this setting, it is probably not coincidental that many of the original groups still seem to exist even though the mat-making operation has now been run down.”

(*Colin Relf*, Rural Development specialist, 1984.)<sup>8</sup>

### ***HAQABTIR – planning for sustainability***

The IRCDP had a 24 month time span in which to accomplish its objectives, and was due to withdraw by the end of 1984, with the stated objective of integrating its activities into those of a national institution to provide continuity. No such relevant institution could be identified, but the Somali and refugee staff of the IRCDP provided a solution to this

<sup>8</sup> Relf, Colin: “Evaluative Study of Selected Rural Development Projects”, ILO Geneva 1984.

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problem of continuity. The four senior staff members (three of whom were Somali, and one – the agronomist – a refugee) had all been involved in implementing activities since 1983; they resolved to form a legally recognised voluntary agency to continue the work of the ILO and gradually to develop other income-earning activities among refugees and local people in refugee affected areas.

There was no precedent for the formation of an indigenous NGO as a legal entity in Somalia. With support from UNHCR, ILO and the National Refugee Commission, and the help of a lawyer, Somali staff spent several months exploring the avenues for legal registration, which was finally achieved through registration in the regional court in Mogadishu. In August 1984 Haqabtir became the first independent Somali NGO committed to and engaged in development work. At the end of that year, Haqabtir took over the IRCDP's work, along with its assets and some unused project funds, which were reallocated for its administrative support for 12 months.

An evaluation of Haqabtir's work one year later found that it had maintained effective support to the activities initiated by the IRCDP, and that it was gradually developing other projects in partnership with international NGOs, to help increase its resources and the scope of its work. To increase its capacity, the ILO organised study tours for Haqabtir staff to learn from NGO activities in other East African countries. By 1986, the formation of Haqabtir had paved the way for the establishment of several new Somali NGOs formed with international NGO assistance, while Haqabtir had spread its work to include additional camps and some local communities in the camps' vicinity. It continued in this work until 1990, when civil war broke out throughout the country.<sup>9</sup>

## Sudan

In 1981, when ILO first fielded its mission to Sudan to explore income generating and training activities for refugees, the country was hosting over half a million refugees who had over the past 15 years successively crossed the border into Sudan from the Congo, Chad, Uganda, Ethiopia and Eritrea. Refugees of different ethnic origins and different cultures and backgrounds came into Sudan and spread themselves over wide areas of the country. By 1983, when the ILO's Income-Generating Scheme for Refugees in the Eastern and Central Sudan was formulated, there were 1.3 million refugees in the country, more than half newly arrived from Eritrea and Ethiopia.

Government policy was to try to accommodate as many refugees as possible in two different types of organised settlements: land settlements, in semi-arid rainfed areas where refugees with a rural background could be allocated small plots for cultivation, and wage-earning settlements, near urban markets or large irrigated farming schemes where it was expected that refugees would find paid employment. But by 1984, only 100,000 refugees had been officially settled, and the greater majority had moved without official sanction to urban areas, in some cases making up a quarter of the population in major towns such as Gedaref, Port Sudan and Kassala, where their main source of income was casual employment and often, in the case of female-headed households, prostitution.

With funds from UNHCR, the ILO sent a multi-disciplinary mission in 1981 to identify the scope and content of a programme to provide employment, income generation and training in refugee-affected areas spread through Eastern and Central Sudan, one of Africa's least developed countries. The agricultural sector had stagnated through the 1970s, in spite of the establishment of large mechanised schemes which provided some

<sup>9</sup> Of Haqabtir's five senior staff members, three were killed in the fighting, one found asylum in the USA, another (originally a refugee in Somalia) was granted asylum in Germany.

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increase in agricultural employment but could not meet traditional peasants' growing need for income and employment to survive. The large agricultural schemes had also encroached on traditional herding areas of nomadic pastoralist groups and displaced them. The urban areas were already filled with unemployed people displaced from the rural areas. The presence of refugees strained the fragile infrastructure of the country, and swelled the already crowded slums.

The local communities in the agricultural settlements and the towns were often as impoverished as the refugees, and the project therefore aimed to include non-refugees in assistance for income generation. A package of 16 projects was proposed to create employment opportunities and reliable sources of income for both refugees and Sudanese living in the same localities.<sup>10</sup>

The projects were formulated on the premise that the refugees "were not a transient phenomenon" and that solutions should go beyond short-term relief assistance to long-term proposals to enable the refugees to achieve self-reliance. They concentrated on income-generating activities that were based on an in-depth and very comprehensive study of the labour market in Sudan, so that training could be geared towards the refugees' integration into the local labour market. Special attention was given in the project design to vulnerable groups among the refugees, especially women, youth and the aged.

An important element – and unusual in a refugee context – of the overall programme was the thoroughness of the initial data gathering: from 1981 to 1983, consultants conducted surveys of the refugees' socio-economic background and skills, examined the kinds of self-help activities that were already being undertaken by spontaneously settled refugees, and the situation of female-headed households. These studies were particularly important because the refugee population was not a homogeneous one – needs obviously varied according to language and country of origin, as well as age, sex, type of household and background. Above all, the programme's aims were to include the refugees in project design from the start: "Maximum participation of refugees in the decision-making process is called for...The present post-relief situation and the objective of transforming the refugee camps into viable communities make the participation of refugees in the running of their settlements a necessity."<sup>11</sup>

Neither the agricultural or wage-earning settlements provided refugees with a reliable or adequate income. The land settlements were established in low-rainfall areas and the plots given to refugees were too small to provide a secure livelihood. In the wage-earning settlements, there was a high level of poverty among refugees because demand for labour fluctuated, and wages were very low. In both cases there were few, if any, other sources of employment. The ILO therefore proposed to establish pilot income generating activities, in agriculture, small-scale industries and services in both rural and urban areas, together with a revolving loan fund to finance these enterprises.

Project staff studied the feasibility of activities which could supplement agricultural incomes, and identified 15 types of viable projects that included agriculture-related activities such as dairy, poultry and bee-keeping, vegetable gardening and food processing; small scale industries such as spinning and weaving, carpentry, brick-making, electrical and mechanical repairs and leatherwork; and services such as secretarial pools in the urban

<sup>10</sup> "Income Generating Activities for Refugees in the Sudan – Report of the UNHCR/ILO Inter-Disciplinary mission on the employment, income generation and training of refugees in the Sudan," ILO Geneva, 1982.

<sup>11</sup> "Towards Self-Reliance: A programme of action for refugees in Eastern and Central Sudan", ILO Geneva, 1984.

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areas. Several of these activities were intended to reach the most vulnerable groups, particularly female-headed households. The aim was to create as many new employment opportunities as possible in a total of four towns and 15 settlements, with the assistance of international NGOs and local agencies which would be partners in implementation, and to which the ILO would provide specific support services, including access to a revolving loan fund, and to a Technology and Marketing Advisory Service. As far as possible, the enterprises were based on existing skills, but with training available to upgrade them, for both Sudanese and refugees.

Together with this package of small enterprises, a complementary project, “Organisational Structure for the Promotion of Self Reliance among Refugees”, was designed and implemented, which aimed to ensure the participation of refugees in the management of project activities, and to establish common services such as transport, purchasing and marketing facilities, so as to benefit from economies of scale and to overcome the isolation of the settlements and the very small scale enterprises located in them.

The project began its activities in 1983, with funding from several donors including UNHCR, while the revolving loan fund was launched in 1985 with a grant from the German government, with a central Fund Committee to supervise its operations. By 1987, the revolving loan fund had financed the activities of 96 small-scale activities, providing employment for over 400 people; 90 per cent of the enterprises were run by refugees and the remainder by Sudanese, while 12 per cent were run by women. The operation of the loan scheme was based on the solidarity group model for collective responsibility, and the repayment of loans was impressive, with 96 per cent loan recovery after 24 months of operation. Medium and short-term loans were being given to informal groups, co-operatives and individuals for activities that ranged from animal husbandry and cheese-making to welding, tailoring and weaving.

An integral element of the overall project was the establishment of a Technology and Marketing Advisory Service, which provided advice and technical guidance to the activities financed by the revolving loan fund as well as to existing self-employed artisans and the income-generating activities which were being implemented by different local and international agencies with ILO and UNHCR support. The basic premises of the service were that local materials should be used rather than imported goods; that available skills should be upgraded, rather than introducing new ones which required long and experienced training; that local equipment and processes should be used wherever possible; and that potential market demand should be established before the start of any venture. Training too was an important component, which covered co-operative formation and management as well as technical skills and included fellowships for four Sudanese extension officers.

The number and variety of enterprises that were assisted by the Service are impressive: they included carpet design and production costing, upgrading the facilities of an Ethiopian restaurant, soap-making units in several settlement sites, yarn bleaching and assisting a women’s group to initiate a market centre to provide a purchasing and sales service for income-generating activities.

### ***The impact***

An evaluation of the revolving loan fund in 1987 showed that “the asset base of the beneficiaries has widened and their income has risen substantially”.<sup>12</sup> As the only

<sup>12</sup> “Income Generating Activities for Refugees in Easter and Central Sudan: The Revolving Fund Scheme”, Terminal Report of Phase I, ILO Geneva 1989.

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institutional source of credit available to poor refugees and Sudanese alike, the ILO project made an unprecedented impact in Sudan, and “as a part of the process of restoring much-needed self assurance and overcoming trauma of the displaced person, a general awareness of their own development prospects has been stimulated, and the project has rekindled savings and banking habits among refugees.” The loans seemed to have stimulated the refugees’ determination to succeed in their ventures and reduced their dependency on assistance at a time when food aid was gradually being phased out and the refugees faced much insecurity.

The support services that were provided by the project differentiated it from others operating in Sudan and helped to develop new production techniques and to upgrade existing enterprises, while the implementation of wide-ranging small-scale activities also stimulated local production and incomes. The revolving fund’s contribution to poverty alleviation in refugee affected areas encouraged donor support for similar schemes, including funding by UNDP to launch a women’s programme for income generation among refugees and Sudanese women. Nevertheless because of the low purchasing power of refugees in the settlements, the overall impact of these activities was disproportionately distributed to urban areas, where social and economic conditions for income generation were generally easier.

The problems that faced the project during its implementation related in many ways to the scale of its operation. It covered such a vast area, with 28 settlements and six towns included in its activities, that tremendous efforts were needed to maintain efficiency and effectiveness, with bottlenecks in transporting materials and equipment. The loan fund was too small to make a substantial impact on the demand that had been created - of the 2500 loan applications in 1986, for example, funds were available for only 94 loans and refugees’ expectation were disappointed. In spite of efforts to encourage entrepreneurs to set up collective marketing and purchasing services, through the ILO’s Organisational Structure Project, there were still no significant efforts to join forces and develop economies of scale. To a large extent, as with the experience in Somalia, the enterprises in the settlements continued to depend on the logistics, transport and services of the project to procure materials and market products.

The most severe constraint to long-term sustainability, however, was the familiar one that faces aid organisations in every refugee situation: the lack of a sustainable institutional base to secure and continue activities once the project is closed.

It was intended that the ILO’s Technical and Advisory Services should be handed over to a specially formed “Small Scales Industries Board” which would be affiliated to the Ministry of Industry or the University of Khartoum, but the Board was never formed. Nor could the Advisory Service establish contacts with other related agencies or find an alternative base from which it could be operated, such as an institutional workshop with a technical staff or an extension service.

Similarly the question of institutionalising the revolving loan fund remained problematic: the loan scheme had marked the beginning of alternative credit provision in Sudan for poor people who had no collateral to secure formal loans. Before the close of the project in 1990, it was crucial to its survival that a registered self-financing and self supporting organisation should be formed, with expanded capital, managed and run by trained nationals and refugees, which could provide small and medium loans for both refugees and poor Sudanese.

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### 3. THE ANTI-APARTHEID PROGRAMME

The ILO's Anti-Apartheid Programme was launched in 1964, following a unanimous decision by the International Labour Conference to take concrete measures to help eliminate apartheid. In its early years, work concentrated on information and analysis of the labour and social situation in South Africa and in the neighbouring "frontline" states, but in 1978 the programme began to initiate and implement projects that provided direct technical assistance to victims of apartheid. Its activities gathered momentum through the 1980s, as thousands of mostly young men and women fled South Africa and Namibia and grouped under the organisational structures of their national liberation movements in neighbouring countries, particularly in Angola, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Tanzania.

The anti-apartheid programme was essentially a training programme. From the start, its projects were designed on the basic assumption that there would be two distinctly different phases. The short term would aim to address current needs, while also taking into account the future return (whenever that might be) to South Africa and Namibia, when majority rule and independence were achieved. The long-term objectives of the programme focussed on assistance to front-line and neighbouring states to decrease their economic and social dependence on South Africa, and on strengthening the planning and administrative capacity of national liberation movements and trade unions for the transition to democracy in South Africa and independence in Namibia.

In the short term, therefore, the programme's aim included help to South Africans and Namibians outside their countries by providing training they could not obtain under apartheid, and through strengthening the organisational capacity both of the national liberation movements and of the frontline states to accommodate and care for the victims of apartheid. The programme also specifically aimed to increase training and employment opportunities for women victims of apartheid, and to assist migrant workers from neighbouring states who were employed under appalling conditions in South Africa.

By 1993 when the programme officially ended, scores of projects had been implemented, ranging across the spectrum of the ILO's fields of competence, in partnership with the South West African People's Organisation of Namibia (SWAPO) and the two South African liberation movements (the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC)), in Zambia, Zimbabwe, Angola, Lesotho and Tanzania. The trade union organisations were also important implementing partners, as was the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the independent organisation of black workers in South Africa, which all became an enormous force for change in the country.

The programme was co-ordinated by the ILO's Equality of Rights Branch in Geneva but many ILO departments provided their expertise in fields that covered economic and employment policies, workers' education, enterprise development, rehabilitation of the disabled, labour standards and administration, management skills and vocational training. Experts recruited from the region were posted in the Lusaka Area Office, particularly to facilitate liaison with the national liberation movements.

The ILO's multi-disciplinary Southern African Team for Employment Promotion (SATEP) based in Lusaka, and subsequently in Harare, provided critical technical support for several projects related to the Anti-Apartheid Programme – SATEP's main objective was to strengthen the independence of African states in the region by assisting governments and liberation movements to examine employment and development strategy options which lead to a rapid growth of indigenous employment and elimination of poverty.

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Funds came from a wide variety of multi and bilateral sources, including many European countries, UNDP, the UN Commission for Namibia and UNHCR, while the frontline states of Zambia, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Angola provided land, personnel, access to training and other important facilities. The ILO regularly reviewed, updated and initiated projects, organised several special fund-raising missions and steadily increased its own regular budget contributions to the programme.

Activities ranged from the establishment of fully equipped vocational training institutions for Namibians in Angola and South Africans in Tanzania, to fellowships, study tours, research, and seminars and workshops for representatives of workers' organisations.

During the lifetime of the project, it was naturally only possible to judge its impact in relation to its immediate objectives. But in 1986, representatives of the ILO's Governing Body undertook a major evaluation of the performance of 20 different projects underway at the time, which again emphasised the importance of working closely with the national liberation movements to ensure that the programme was responding to their initiatives and that it addressed real needs and had full impact.

It is of course not possible even now, 12 years after its closure, to judge precisely and fully the extent to which the programme's long-term objectives were met, and the overall impact of the programme once Namibians and South Africans had returned home. But there can be little doubt that it contributed to the human resources available in these newly democratic countries at many levels: the Labour Department in Namibia, for example, now has a number of senior officials who took part in the programme's training courses for labour administration. The programme not only provided a wide variety of skills, from office management to motor mechanics and labour administration, which could be applied back home - it provided a forum for the discussion and examination of issues that would be important for the future democratically elected governments to understand and resolve, including manpower planning and employment development, social security, labour administration, migrant labour and the rehabilitation of the disabled. The head of the ANC's economic department through the 1980s has stressed the contribution made by the programme's research activities and the provision of fellowships, to economic planning capacity.

“One of the most important aspects of collaboration with the ILO was the facilitation of access to research and researchers all over the world, and the assistance and encouragement to research which enabled ANC to formulate economic policy issues in the 1980s, before majority rule...for example, on migrant labour. We worked closely with SATEP, which provided scholarships, and much of the assistance was innovative. An important aspect was the workshops that were organised on economic and labour issues – these were not only valuable for their content, but they enabled us to make contact with people inside the country, again facilitating the process of policy formulation. Most remarkable was the commitment – it was more than a recipient/donor relationship.”

*(Max Sisulu, formerly chairperson of the ANC's Economic Department)<sup>13</sup>*

## **The setting**

Through the 1980s, and particularly in 1984, large numbers of young people left South Africa. Many of these refugees were grouped in Tanzania, principally in the ANC's

<sup>13</sup> Sisulu, Max, in a personal interview with the author. Max Sisulu, formerly chairperson of the ANC's Economic Department and currently Deputy Chief Executive Officer of Denel.

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Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College and its ILO-assisted vocational training centre at Dakawa in the eastern region of Morogoro, which provided living and educational facilities, and operated production units established by the ANC to meet the needs of the community in agriculture, clothing, furniture, building and construction, transport, and health. South African exiles were also organised under the PAC, but they were fewer, and more often urban-based refugees. Namibian exiles were grouped under SWAPO principally in Angola. All three organisations also established small settlements in Zambia and Zimbabwe, while Lesotho also hosted a few hundred refugees from South Africa. ILO's assistance, therefore, entailed project implementation in all these countries, often in geographically isolated settlement camps where communications, transport and logistics proved particularly difficult.

There were basic and significant differences between the national liberation movements, which determined the amount and the type of assistance needed from the ILO. South Africans generally came from an urban industrialised background, with relatively high levels of education compared to young Namibian refugees who spoke little English and generally had little formal education. As a result, joint training schemes were not always appropriate, and different types of fellowships had to be offered.

### ***The projects***

In many ways, it is difficult to divide the projects between those that aimed for short-term impact and those that had a longer perspective, given that many would clearly serve a double purpose. A project for vocational rehabilitation of disabled victims of the liberation war in Namibia, for example, aimed to meet the basic needs of disabled Namibians in the refugee camps in Angola, and to have a number of trained Namibian staff at all levels of rehabilitation work, stressing that "the full impact of this project will only be felt after the liberation of Namibia when normal integration and resettlement of the Namibian refugees becomes possible".<sup>14</sup>

An important element of the Anti-Apartheid Programme provided fellowships, which aimed to support more long-term goals. South Africans and Namibians were able to study a wide range of trades and professions in institutions in the region and abroad, sometimes with periods of practical in-service training. For example, 31 Namibians (of whom two-thirds were women) followed a specially designed course in Zambia for four months in labour administration, followed by a 12 months' attachment to the Labour Administration Department in Zimbabwe, in order to ensure that there would be staff who were knowledgeable in the theory and practice of a development-oriented labour administration at independence. Several members of SACTU were given one-year scholarships to study labour relations at Ruskin College in Oxford.

The ILO's SATEP project provided advanced training, with tailor-made practical in-service courses and experience in employment and development planning, to selected high level cadres of the national liberation movements. The studies aimed to ensure that the movements had the technical competence to gather and analyse data on their country's economic and social structures, on which to base policies to meet employment needs and equitable economic growth.

These one or two year attachments to SATEP by high-level cadres of the liberation movements continued throughout the life of the programme, with little loss of this new expertise to the organisations. Of the first four people who received these nine-month

<sup>14</sup> Samset, K., "Evaluation of ILO's Anti-Apartheid Programme – Background Paper", ILO Geneva, 1985.

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fellowships in 1984, for example, three continued to apply their knowledge until they returned to their home countries: of the two fellows from the ANC, one became chairman of the ANC's economic unit and the other headed a research unit in the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU), while the PAC fellow took further studies in manpower planning and the SWAPO candidate went on to study economics.

Other ILO programmes in the region also provided training: there were attachments for in-service training to the ILO African Regional Labour Administration Centre (ARLAC), for example, and women from SWAPO participated in the training for data collection techniques through the Community Profile Programme of the ILO's Nairobi-based Skills Development for Self-Reliance project. Local institutions in Zambia, and particularly Zimbabwe provided training. Three PAC members were attached to a government printing enterprise in Zimbabwe, for example, and labour administration trainees from ANC and SWAPO were attached to labour offices in both countries.

Throughout the life of the programme, workshops were organised on a wide range of topics: workers' education, international labour standards; discriminatory labour legislation in the mining, metal, and agricultural sector in South Africa; the needs of black South African women workers; and equality of opportunity and treatment for domestic, railway and transport workers in South Africa. Often participants also included men and women who had made their way from South Africa specially to attend the workshop.

Generally workshops and seminars were seen as having primarily long-term objectives. These short training exercises were not necessarily a prelude to immediate concrete action, but were rather useful introductions to the critical issues which would have to be addressed in the future: a training workshop on the rural development options for Namibia, for example, looked to SWAPO's urgent needs to address land and agricultural reform after independence.

A consultant in 1985 pointed out that there was perhaps too much emphasis on the long-term objectives of these workshops – they could be geared to provide a link between theory and practice and serve a dual purpose if they were followed up by professional assistance in identifying needs to make projects more relevant. Through the last five years until 1991, as South Africans were preparing to return home and the move to majority rule was clearly imminent, workshop topics tended to move from the more generalised to the technically specific and covered labour law reform, occupational safety and health, and incomes and employment policies geared to future action, all topics based on requests by the liberation movements.

The courses that were provided to upgrade ANC's clerical workers and office management staff, at the organisation's request, aimed to improve the overall efficiency of the ANC's administrative infrastructure, and had immediate and tangible impact. The 15 secretarial and office staff who were trained in 1985 reported that they had a better understanding of what they were doing and felt far more confident in their work, while ANC management judged that their productivity and motivation had greatly improved. Similarly, the 13 ANC officials trained in office management felt their work had benefited. All participants continued to work with the organisation after their training, and some were promoted to more responsible positions. In 1989, these successful courses were repeated for 40 ANC members. Equally practical was the financial support given for 12 women officials and workers from the ANC in Lusaka to take driving lessons, "to strengthen the Women's Section and make them less reliant on the overall shortage of qualified drivers within the ANC".

Among the most ambitious projects was the delivery of a fully equipped vocational training centre to SWAPO in Angola, where thousands of young Namibians had fled as a result of South African occupation, and had been resettled in refugee camps. Vocational

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training for these young people was a top priority for SWAPO, in order to provide self-reliant skills for the refugees and to begin to establish a nucleus of trained Namibians able to contribute to economic development after independence. The Angolan government allocated land for the training centre in Kwanza-Sul Province, while UNDP and the Fund for Namibia provided a total of US\$5.3 million. The centre aimed to train 100 semi-skilled workers a year, with a two-year syllabus covering six trades geared to international standard classifications of occupations. In spite of many logistical difficulties, by 1986 there were 194 trainees, about 30 per cent of whom were women. In an isolated setting, students were provided with modern training and equipment. For young Namibian refugees who generally had very little formal education, the centre became a great resource: “SWAPO accords high priority to this project ...(because) it can be used in the development of their own settlements, thereby improving the living conditions for the refugee population of Namibians”.<sup>15</sup>

“The training was extremely practical and effective – training in all the six trades taught there was designed to be put to immediate use. The building trainees built the houses for the students and staff, the carpentry trainees did the woodwork and made the furniture, the trainee plumbers put in the plumbing, and so on. We used the trainees’ models and you could see the improvements as the numbers of buildings progressed. It was very hands on, and the Centre became a very self-sufficient and effective place.

There were difficulties: suddenly a doubling in the number of students because of political events in Namibia, for example. The situation was such a very particular one, and it didn’t always fit in with bureaucratic ways of funding. But the ILO was sensitive and supportive in an abnormal situation. We were always able to give our views .

“The ex-trainees are scattered over the country, in the Ministry of Works and Supplies, in the Polytechnic – I see several familiar faces at the Government Garage, graduates from the auto mechanics training section. In retrospect, perhaps the former trainees were spread too thin – they were sometimes isolated and not always able to reinforce each other.... But there were no problems with absorption in these fields after independence.”

Mr. Mose P. Chitendero, formerly Head of the Vocational Training Centre in Kwanza-Sul.<sup>16</sup>

Through its four years, the project faced some lengthy delays and problems of co-ordination with many actors and donors, such as the UNDP.

The vocational training institution established with the ANC at Dakawa in Tanzania had a more modest budget at just over one million US dollars. It aimed to provide training for productive skills and self-reliance in host countries, and complemented a UNESCO-ANC project which focused on more general education. Here too, there were delays in construction and overall execution, which could in part be attributed to the then inexperience of the ANC in managing the implementation of the project. The centre was completed in 1987, and training begun in a variety of trades, with seven teachers drawn from ANC members and specially trained in preparation for this. In 1989, when there were around 60 students, an evaluation found that “the Vocational Training Centre forms an important part of the educational opportunities available for the ANC youth”. Training included motor mechanics, welding, machine operating and plumbing and carpentry.

In marked contrast to the successful outcome of these projects, and the concrete contributions made by the vocational centres provided for SWAPO and ANC, were earlier

<sup>15</sup> Samset, K., op cit

<sup>16</sup> Chitendero, Mose P., Speaker of the House of Parliament in Namibia, personal interview with the author.

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attempts to initiate vocational training for ANC and PAC by placing young refugees nominated by the movements in Tanzanian vocational training institutions: the liberation movements found it difficult to provide suitable candidates, and none could speak Swahili, the language of instruction in Tanzania. By the end of the project in 1984, just over half of the numbers planned had received training. The project had clearly not been based on a study of the needs of the two movements at the time, nor of the capacity of Tanzanian vocational training institutions, where there were few facilities and an acute shortage of equipment.

Only one project, funded by UNHCR, aimed to encourage small enterprise development as a means to self-reliance, to assist the relatively small number of South African refugees who had settled in Lesotho who were receiving UNHCR subsistence allowances. The results were modest, with 15 operational businesses, having created employment for a total of 88 refugees, falling considerably short of the project's target. A visible weakness was the negligible involvement of women, who had been overlooked at the project design stage, "an omission that was repeated throughout the implementation, monitoring and evaluation processes of the project".<sup>17</sup>

Activities linked to reducing the frontline states' dependence on the remittances of migrant workers to South Africa concentrated primarily on research and advisory services by SATEP to the countries most affected (Botswana, Lesotho and Mozambique). Studies, which were carried out by national research institutes with SATEP's technical support over several years, included skills profiles of migrant workers and prospects for their redeployment in their own countries; research on the legislative framework controlling migrant labour in South Africa; and migrant workers' conditions, in South Africa and in the home base, in areas such compensation, health care facilities, and contract renewals. Through this work, SATEP not only contributed to the development of a policy base for employment strategies, but played an important role in promoting regional cooperation for this.

Most importantly, conditions and regulations for recruitment were harmonised by the countries involved as a result of this work, leading to the formation of the Southern Africa Labour Commission (which later became the Employment and Labour Sector of SADC).

Workers' education however, also played a part in addressing the problems migrant workers face in South Africa. In Lesotho, where migrant workers' remittances were the largest source of foreign exchange, the programme launched a series of widely attended seminars and study workshops for would-be migrant workers, which provided information on their rights, on workers' organisations, the content of the contract that would be signed by the workers, and negotiating procedures on terms and conditions of employment. The focus was also on the rights and responsibilities that follow union membership.

These short training exercises were conducted by experts from the ILO's Workers' Education Branch and by officials of the Lesotho trade union federation (LCFTU). Over the period from November 1983 to July 1985, a total of 3,500 prospective migrant workers had received at least one day's orientation in workers' rights and two thirds of these had attended a three-day basic trade union course. In the years that followed, the Lesotho trades union federation continued workers' education activities, holding 43 training sessions that included 1,075 union members. Although there was no follow-up by the project to assess what percentage of workers had joined a union as a result of the training, or if any had become union activists, the National Union of Mineworkers in South Africa

<sup>17</sup> Jennings, Mary, "Women's role in small enterprise development in Lesotho", ILO Geneva, 1989.

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strongly supported the project's objectives and judged that it had increased migrant workers' awareness of their position as mine workers.

Requests for training gathered momentum in the late 1980s, as change seemed imminent in South Africa: the programme expanded to include support for training in regional and European institutions in subjects ranging from printing, tourism, accounting and management, to computer use and shipping and transport.

Among the most important activities were two seminars, to discuss the studies "Skills Profiles of Black South Africans" organised jointly by SATEP and the ANC in 1986 and 1988, in response to the ANC's request for ILO assistance to build the capacity of its Department of Manpower development. These were followed in 1989 by a seminar on "Manpower Development in a Future South Africa", held in Harare and attended by 36 participants (33 of whom came from within South Africa) to identify priority research and training needs in the field of human resources development, and to establish a working structure to co-ordinate manpower development programmes within South Africa.

### ***The impact***

By 1986, a total of 224 people (of whom 28 per cent were women) had received vocational or professional training for longer than three months and 593 (50 per cent women) had attended seminars or courses of less than three months, while the newly completed vocational training centres in Angola and Tanzania were geared to train 200 each annually, of whom a third were women. Altogether, a total of 361 women had benefited from the programme in 1986. In the next five years there was considerable effort within the programme to increase training and employment opportunities for women victims of apartheid as a separate objective, as it appeared in the programme design. Training designed specifically for women included co-operative development, data collection and analysis, trade union organisation (including the situation of domestic workers in South Africa) and labour laws and administration.

The urgency and magnitude of the programme, with so many projects being developed and implemented in such a relatively short time, led to some short-cuts: in some cases, particularly in the early years of the programme, projects seemed not to have been developed in response to genuinely articulated needs of the national liberation movements, but rather on the basis of assumptions made by ILO on what would be a useful project for the organisations. In many cases also, time and resources did not allow for a thorough examination of needs and relevance on which to base the project design.

The inexperience and uneven management capacity of the liberation movements at that time also frequently led to delays in implementation, as in the construction of the Dakawa Vocational training Centre, for example. Of the initial 20 projects implemented by 1986, 17 had involved the national liberation movements directly in implementation, which often influenced the speed and effectiveness of their development: external events (sudden new influxes in refugees, or problems of security for example), language barriers, a lack of expertise and international experience, and the frequent absence of leaders could all delay decisions and activities. To offset this, however, there was little bureaucracy to overcome, a strong commitment to the projects by the organisations, and an urgency to get things done.

More damaging were the major delays throughout the life of the programme brought about by the slow moving multi-bilateral funding machinery – a familiar problem that the projects in Somalia and Sudan also had to adjust to, but that loomed particularly large throughout the implementation of the Anti-Apartheid Programme. Much needed funds were lost, and projects lost their impetus and impact because of these delays.

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The programme was the sum total of its parts – it was unique as a coordinated effort to mobilise technical and financial resources from a wide variety of sources to provide assistance, and demonstrated how effective concerted action can be. Most importantly, the ILO was able to contribute to the capacity building of the trade unions, which were a major force in bringing about change in South Africa.

An ANC academic working with the programme at the time has stressed the relevance of the research and workshops which concentrated on the analysis of critical sectors in the country's economy and which highlighted the skewed distribution of skills in the country.

“The programme was certainly very focused. There were at least four different projects, each dealing with the labour market in strategic sectors of the South African economy. These included the metal, transport, agricultural and manufacturing sectors. The project on the manufacturing sector concerned the overall skills capacity in the manufacturing sector throughout the country as well as some specialised studies of the chemical, mining and metal sectors.

Trade Union officials from South Africa attended the week-long seminars in Zimbabwe and Lusaka. The programme must have done something right as it seemed to help develop a fairly large number of activists who became part of COSATU's top leadership. The quality of the discussion varied according to the sectors and the level of attendants. In all the sessions a number of high level trade union officials were normally present as well as the middle level trade union cadres. It was to the credit of the trade unions (and the urgent need for this type of dialogue) that they persevered with the programme, despite the intense intimidation of participants by the apartheid government. The ILO's organisation of the various seminars was sensitive and discreet; also very efficient.

In retrospect, I think the programme was helpful in raising the level of understanding of trade unionists from the problems of the shop floor to the economic and structural problems in the sectors as a whole. It was also important for networking and provided an opportunity for the more politically-minded participants to make contact with the ANC and SACTU. They were not “management” sessions, so the capacity developed was of a strategic nature around the industry itself and the sector's place in the overall economy.

Many of the problems within the labour market discussed at these seminars were obvious targets to be addressed subsequently in the legislation of the ANC government, especially the new laws on equity, affirmative action; the Labour Relations Act, and the land restitution programme. The major structural problem of the economy – the dearth of skills in all the strategic sectors – remains a long-term project for the new dispensation. The ILO's skills development report, which could have been the starting point for a major assault on the skewed distribution of skills in the country, has not been given the priority of attention it deserves.”

Professor Norman Levy, academic and ANC researcher<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Levy, Norman, Professor of Political Science and Government, University of Western Cape; personal interview with the author.

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In 1993, the ILO prefaced its work in South Africa by sending a multi-disciplinary mission to prepare a plan of action in support of the transition to full democracy. The aims of the mission were a continuation of those that had guided the activities of the anti-apartheid programme: to assist the country in the formulation of its labour law and labour relations, and to provide support to workers' and employers' organisations for affirmative action and equality of rights, employment and human resources development, and social protection.

Similarly the programme laid the groundwork for policies in labour administration, social security and vocational training and rehabilitation in independent Namibia. Through 1982 to 1990, disabled Namibians in exile were trained at various levels, in Zambian institutions and in Europe, in vocational rehabilitation. In 1991, an ILO consultant then made an assessment of vocational rehabilitation needs in newly independent Namibia, which led to the adoption of an integrated policy on social development for disabled persons, in the "National Plan on the Integration of Disabled People". The National Organisation for Disabled People was formed in 1991, whose Director was provided with training by the ILO in Zimbabwe and Germany.

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## 4. IN RETROSPECT

In all projects, refugees and aid agencies shared basic assumptions of impermanence and that project activities were as much as anything else a preparation for a different way of life in the future. More than in any other setting, project implementation for assistance to refugees is influenced not only by changing circumstances in that setting, but also by the prospect and expectation of radical change. This was particularly the case with the design and execution of the Anti-Apartheid Programme, where assistance was principally geared to the refugees' reintegration in South Africa and Namibia. In Sudan, and particularly in Somalia, it was clear that the current circumstance in which the refugees were living could not be sustained, but the future for the refugees was very uncertain. A sense of impermanence is not conducive to small enterprise development – nor does it encourage participation in training unless its relevance is immediately obvious.

Project activities aimed at developing income generation to enhance community self-reliance in Sudan. Most particularly, in Somalia, they were established in circumstances which demanded an approach that differed in many ways from that needed with groups in settled communities. Thousands of refugees, living in an artificially and hastily created temporary environment and dependent on outside aid for their survival, do not constitute more than a very temporary "community". Previous successful examples of long-term refugee assistance had depended on settlement on good agricultural land, but this type of solution seemed impossible for the majority of refugees in both countries. In Somalia particularly, the refugees were strongly individualistic in their approach to income-earning activities. In Sudan, however, assistance concentrated particularly on enterprises in an urban setting where joint efforts from refugees was required, particularly for those included in the revolving loan fund's solidarity groups. In both environments, the ILO projects developed some innovative approaches to encourage self-employment and entrepreneurship.

In both Somalia and Sudan, many of these small enterprises provided quite meaningful incomes for their operators, contributing to a measure of self-reliance. But in both cases, many also continued to rely on external logistical and managerial support, particularly to procure raw materials and to market produce. Procurement and marketing are difficult for any small enterprise in rural areas badly served (if at all) by public transport – in an isolated refugee camp settlement, where refugees have no links to external economic networks, the problem can be insurmountable without external assistance. The solution is often seen in encouraging and supporting joint procurement and marketing by small business ventures, to reach economies of scale – but these organisational efforts are complex and take time and considerable training to develop. It could be argued that it is unrealistic to expect self-reliance in all aspects of enterprise development within the two or three years generally allowed for the implementation of this type of project.

Overall, rural settlement camps are certainly not ideal settings for income earning activities that lead to refugees' self-reliance. As the Sudan project demonstrated by its urban bias, towns are an easier setting for the encouragement of small-scale production and services. Rural settlement camps gradually do develop their own internal economies, and their external links – in Somalia, some camp markets were so thriving that private minibus shuttles to the nearest town operated regularly. But even these operations, based on the sales of essential food produce, face the fundamental constraints of all rural-based enterprises that depend on low and seasonal cash flows and purchasing power in the surrounding areas. Food rations and other essential basic items are provided by UNHCR, and brought in from outside the camp. Cooperation between UNHCR, the aid agencies and refugees to encourage local in-camp production and procurement of basic items (such as soap) gives an impetus to refugees' production and shifts some of the benefits of

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procurement to the refugees – making them in turn more active participants than passive recipients.

Very often, refugees and aid agencies have conflicting objectives: the sale of food and other rations provided to refugees is generally accepted as necessary if not officially sanctioned – and the importance that refugees place on continuing aid is understandable. In their alien environment, refugees have no security beyond the aid they receive even while they are aware of its possible impermanence. Projects which aim to reduce their dependency on aid demand that refugees relinquish, at least partially, their secure subsistence base in exchange for activities which involve risk taking, in an already uncertain situation and where the future is unknown. Inevitably this underlying conflict in ultimate objectives influences the relationship between refugees and aid workers and often causes mistrust. This uneasy relationship is often exacerbated by a lack of coordination among the agencies themselves, so that both refugees and the NGO workers at the grassroots level can often be taken by surprise at a decision made in the distant capital or UN headquarters. It is necessarily a condition for a participatory approach that the refugees and the aid workers share major objectives – but mutual trust is slow to build and quick to destroy.

Only in exceptional cases, as with the liberation movements in the Anti-Apartheid programme, is it possible to provide assistance from the start to organised cohesive groups of refugees who have a common purpose. In settlement camps, there are at first generally few (if any) refugee structures through which to encourage and support community-based action. Representative structures can take long to emerge – and as the Somali experience showed, unequal access to resources or employment can lead to growing economic and social differences among the refugees which can in turn influence the effectiveness of these structures.

Building local capacity to initiate and implement self-reliance activities is central to the design of any project of assistance to refugees, but this critical element is often left out of the project design – too often, it is assumed that “a suitable local institution” will be found to take over and sustain the project’s activities. These institutions have not generally existed. Whether in Sudan or Somalia in the 1980s, or in Mozambique 15 years later, it has been more common than not for activities initiated by a project to decline and disappear once the foreign implementing agency leaves.

In a situation where “emergency implementation” continues beyond the actual emergency, and where donors demand quick results, it becomes extremely difficult to establish linkages and promote the community participation needed to ensure a project’s continuity. Community and gender issues can become victims of the trade-off between accelerated implementation and sustainability. In spite of these difficulties, however, the ILO programmes clearly sought actively for continuity and sustainability, as in Somalia, where the IRCDP stimulated the move towards indigenous NGOs which took over and provided continuity until Somalia’s implosion.

The three programmes, in Somalia, Sudan and anti-apartheid South Africa and Namibia, were implemented in very different environments, and each had its unique challenges and experiences. There was in many ways a fundamental difference between the aims of the programme implemented in Southern Africa, which concentrated on long-term impact, and those in Sudan and Somalia which sought solutions for the immediate situation in which the refugees found themselves. They nevertheless shared some common experiences: certainly all suffered from the unreliability of bureaucratic multi-bilateral funding procedures.

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The most common problem faced by all three programmes was the stop-start of project implementation because of irregular disbursements of funds. In some cases, as happened in Somalia, and with some of the Anti-Apartheid projects, initial funding covered a preliminary project period only and delays in decisions to fund further work ground project activities to a temporary halt. And, as the Anti-Apartheid Programme particularly experienced, even when funding was generously allocated to cover several years of activities, projects were sometimes starved of funds because a periodic disbursement was blocked by bureaucracy. In some cases, funds were irretrievably lost because of these delays.

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