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Refugee Resettlement and ways Forward

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By

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Abstract

New Zealand has hosted refugees since World War II and is currently one of only ten countries in the world with a refugee resettlement programme, yet little is known about the experiences and unique needs of new refugees who are culturally, racially and ethnically extremely different from New Zealand mainstream society. The focus of this research is to provide an overview of the experiences the Afghan and Somali refugees have undergone prior to resettlement in New Zealand and the hindrances to realising their dreams in New Zealand as their country of resettlement.

The structure and aims of the research were guided by Alternative Development theory which focuses on eliminating injustice being done to a particular group on the basis of their race, colour, religion or gender and addressing the priority needs of people to achieve sustainable society. To achieve the research objectives, the research has applied participatory methods (individual in-depth interviews, focus groups with interactive activities and discussion and document review).

The research findings indicate that resettlement is a continuum process in which the new refugees are making effort to move away from situation of under-development to a favourable situation of development worthy of decent human life. The research findings also suggest that refugee resettlement, having links with Alternative Development and Human Rights, goes beyond meeting physical needs of refugees. It also covers the restoration and sustainability of people's capabilities.

Finally, the research presents practical ways to empower refugees and foster opportunities to develop their own livelihoods and integrate with structures and systems of New Zealand society.

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List of Acronyms

UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
NZIS	New Zealand Immigration Service
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
UN	United Nation
EU	European Union
IRD	Inland Revenue Department
RMS	Refugee and Migrant Service
RRS	Refugee Resettlement Support
PEETO	Pasifika Education and Employment Training Organisation
CDC	Canterbury Development Co-operation
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
ECE	Early Childhood Education
EC	Early Childhood Centre
SLA	Sustainable Livelihoods Approach
WINZ	Work and Income New Zealand
CYF	Child Youth and Families
CPH	Community and Public Health
TOP	Training Opportunities
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
IMF	International Monetary Fund
TBA	Traditional Birth Attendance
CHCH	Christchurch

CHAPTER 1:

Introduction

This chapter gives the researcher's personal account and the background to the research area refugee resettlement both in International and National context. The Chapter discusses the theoretical bases and the methodology.

1.1 Researcher's Personal Account

My initiative behind undertaking this thesis was based on my own personal experience as a refugee. This began in 1991 when the civil war broke out in the Somali capital, Mogadishu. My family left for a refuge area out on the Somalia and Ethiopia border, while I weighed up whether I was prepared to abandon everything I had worked for. Despite witnessing many horrific scenes, even people I knew being killed, I was not prepared to leave my home country, and dreaming that the situation would improve drove me to remain in the city

After many months of heavy artillery shells falling on my house and serious looting and extreme fear, I was forced to abandon my house and my properties that I had been building for my future life. It was a very hard decision to make, leaving this and all my possessions. Then, I had to flee from Mogadishu to Ethiopia, travelling through hostile communities and very hostile Ethiopian forces and finally going to a refugee camp.

Although life in the camp was extremely poor, for me it was safe heaven because there were no artillery shells falling and my children were also safe. So this drove me to have empathy for those who have been in my situation, and sympathy for those who were trying to survive in the first country of refuge based on my own personal experience. This encouraged me to take up development studies as my preferred career.

Coming to the host country i.e. New Zealand, I came with huge expectations and found these hard to achieve so my dreams were shattered in the beginning. The reason for this was I had no prior knowledge about life in New Zealand, then after some time I realised the host community were very open and keen to help but

unfortunately their desire to help me as a refugee was handicapped by their lack of knowledge about my needs, my previous experience and the circumstances that I went through in my home and first country.

Through the eyes of a refugee, they had also expectations that they would recover what they had lost in the war or their home country when they came to New Zealand, and the reason these expectations were not met was because the refugees were not informed of how the system worked, how they could contribute. It turned into conflicting views between the NZ community and the refugees, they were not matching views when the refugees thought they had come to a rich country and they would have everything they wanted. So my aim in starting this thesis was to clear the existing misunderstanding between these two groups, and this is also part of my contribution to the cause for supporting people who are caught in refugee type situations.

1.2 Background

Throughout the history of mankind, the uprooting and displacing of people against their will has been common practice in many parts of the world. During this time people have also been generous in rescuing people when they are caught in crises, either individually or as part of communities. The type of support offered has ranged from provision for physical needs and other basic needs ranging from settlement to gaining dual citizenship. Because war caused by underdevelopment and related factors still remains the major contributing factor in people becoming refugees; the number of refugee persons has increased significantly during the last decade as conflicts have increased in different parts of the world.

The founding mandate of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee (UNHCR) defines refugees as "persons who are outside their country and cannot return because of a well-substantiated fear of persecution as a result of factors related to their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group" (UNHCR, 2001:1).

New Zealand has been hosting refugees since World War II and is currently one of only ten countries in the world, which have refugee resettlement programmes (New Zealand Immigration Service (NZIS, 2001). New Zealand first received refugees in 1944 when a total of 775 Polish children and 82 adults from the war torn countries of Europe came to New Zealand (Walker, 1996). From that time, the number of refugees making their way to New Zealand and their country of origin has corresponded with prevailing global political circumstances as well as reflecting New Zealand's regional and global priorities of the time (NZIS, 2001).

Refugee resettlement is a complex process. Burnett (1998:3) suggests that "Formulating a definition of settlement raises various theoretical issues which have direct policy implications". The complexity of the term is reflected in the existing differing views about the terms 'resettlement' and 'integration'. It is not clear whether settlement refers to a time frame after reception, or after achievement of certain settlement outcomes. This poses the question of when a refugee person ceases to be called a refugee. There are varied views within the resettling countries about applicable indicators to measure resettlement and integration. Some resettling countries, including New Zealand, tend to often use indicators such as access to employment, level of language, health, and family reunification as mechanisms for measuring resettlement.

New Zealand is one of ten countries in the World¹ that accept refugees for resettlement on an annual quota system (UNHCR, 2002). According to the Tripartite NGO report (2001), the current New Zealand immigration trend reveals that the number of refugees making their way to New Zealand is likely to rise over the next few years. While New Zealand has been struggling to adequately address the needs of refugees and to enhance their participation in New Zealand society it can be argued that the achievement has so far been inadequate in terms of meeting the real resettlement needs. The evidence for this is that many of the issues that refugees confront such as language barriers, cultural issues, weather conditions, housing and health coupled with the struggle to adapt to a new culture, still remain unresolved.

¹ The ten countries are Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States of America.

The existing demands by refugee groups for greater participation in major consultations affecting resettlement ² suggests that policy makers, providers and the host society seem to have only a limited understanding about the resettlement needs of refugees because a top-down approach has been applied. This approach leads to policy makers in social development agencies and service providers failing to consider refugees' cultural backgrounds and their past experiences during policy formulation, a failure which it is argued here is likely to be a key contributing factor in resettlement failure. Therefore, the implications arising from individual experiences needs to be considered during the formulation of policies, planning and delivery of social services programs to achieve sustainable resettlement. This forms the underlying preposition for this thesis.

As result of an inherently top-down approach being applied by resettlement agencies, and based on anecdotal experience, it is not clear to refugee communities what their role in the resettlement process is and there seems to be limited understanding about the policies followed by agencies to tackle issues confronting refugees. Also anecdotal evidence suggests that it is not clear to both refugee communities and the resettlement sector, to what extent and how well existing policies are capable of covering the essential requirements of resettlement.

To resolve the existing gaps, this thesis examines how previous experiences of refugees influence current services and how service providers put into consideration the past experiences in the planning and delivery of resettlement services for refugees.

Due to the fact that resettlement/integration is a continuum (Canadian Council for Refugees, 1998), the analysis at the various stages of refugee protection and resettlement are matters that need to be considered and clarified to both the host society and the refugee communities themselves.

² See 2000 Tripartite reports (A report for the incoming Coalition Government from the NGO sector. Tripartite consultation is consultation between United Nations, New Zealand Government and Resettlement NGOs)

The research aims to:

- Discuss the factors causing people to become refugees
- Explore the factors governing the actual decision to flee and the challenges surrounding the initial flight from home to the nearest country of refuge and life in refugee camps.
- Identify the needs and services offered to refugees after their initial processing on arrival by the various services in Christchurch, New Zealand.
- Identify the existing gaps in services and provide recommendations, including clarifying the roles and responsibilities of potential stakeholders, to harness and enhance existing programs for refugees.

1.3 Theoretical basis

I have chosen to place my research in the context of development studies using empowerment framework as a tool for analysis. In the next chapter Two the theoretical bases of this research are discussed.

1.4 Methodology

The choice of the research methodology is influenced by the focus of the research, which aims to examine refugee experiences, provide insights into the complexities of life in the less developed home countries, the flight experience and settlement in both first and second countries of refuge.

In this research situation, I considered qualitative research the most relevant method to use to gather data that would provide the deepest insight into refugee experiences and resettlement needs in New Zealand. To achieve qualitative information from the key resettlement stakeholders (Refugee communities, Central government, Christchurch City Council, and NGOs in Christchurch), involved the research has applied PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) techniques:

- Individual in-depth interviews
- Focus groups with interactive activities and discussion
- Document review

PRA methods have been selected because PRA encompasses a growing family of approaches and methods which enable local communities such as refugees to "share, enhance and analyse their knowledge of life and conditions, to plan, act, monitor, and evaluate" (Chambers, 1997:1). Chambers also argues that poor people can improve their quality of life if they are given the opportunity and adequate access to the decision making process (Chambers, 1997).

The choice of qualitative methodology and PRA methods used in this research is greatly influenced by the desire to elicit a broad range of experiences and perspectives from the various stakeholders (refugees, NGOs and central government agencies). For that reason the qualitative research method was felt to facilitate an equitable power relation between the researcher and research participants (see Maykut and Morehouse, 1999). The qualitative method is further relevant to this research situation as it permits participants' fuller expression of their experiences and needs in their own terms (Walsh, 1996).

The method was particularly valuable in the case of this research, given the existing disparity in the participants' experiences and capabilities, which necessitated the research to be conducted by using loosely, structured interviews without requiring a predetermined structure. This gives the researcher the freedom to allow the interviewees to simply talk (Welsh, 1996). Maykut and Morehouse (1999) argue that qualitative research is more concerned with examining people's words and actions in ways which give a clearer image of the situation according to the experience of the participants.

Gender issues were given due consideration during the implementation of the research to ensure the research outcome is gender balanced. The desire to achieve gender balance remained a key-motivating factor in the choice of methodology.

Another advantage which influenced the choice of the qualitative research methodology is its flexibility and openness to change, giving the researcher opportunities to code collected data as well as to regularly revise the data during collection and drafting stages. In qualitative research "the coding is ongoing, changeable" (Davidson and Tolich, 2001: 158)

Data Collection

The collection of relevant data for the research was undertaken through reviews of relevant literature, interviews with participants (communities and agencies) and document and report reviews.

In addition to the questionnaire, notes taken during interviews were also important sources of information. Reviews of relevant literature and the empirical theories on development and migration provided the broader conceptual framework for this research.

The sources of information for this research are from:

- Individual, in-depth interviews
- Focus group interviews
- Review of relevant literature on development and refugee resettlement
- Document review

Selection and access to participants

The process for the fieldwork interviews started with paying initial courtesy calls to the community leaders to seek their support and ask advice about how to conduct the interviews with participants in a culturally sensitive manner.

The respondents were planned to be randomly identified based on gender (50% men and 50% women, age (over 14 years) and length of time in New Zealand (1-6 years) and pre refugee experience. Factors such as appropriateness in terms of quietness and comfort influenced the choice of interview venues. Appendix One gives characteristics of respondents.

Conducting Interviews

The work of Welsh (1996) on how to conduct qualitative research was closely followed during the entire process to maximise the respondents' contributions. Welsh urges researchers conducting qualitative interviews to follow the following sequence:

- a) Researcher self-introduction: introduce the research and give explanatory comments about the purpose of the research and seek participants' consent regarding the use of audiotape and note taking.
- b) Warm up: ask ice-breaking questions and avoid threatening language.
- c) Main body of the interview: ask simple questions and leave (to the last) more complicated ones to the end.
- d) Cool off use simple question to ease any emerging tension.
- e) Closure remark: Express appreciation

The individual interviews helped to generate information about people's experiences in their home countries, their first country of refuge as well their current needs and concerns. Both the individual respondents and the focus group were asked questions relating to their experience in their home country, their first country, their expectation of New Zealand and their concerns in Christchurch. Questions asked at focus group and individual interviews are in Appendix Two.

Focus group participants provided information concerning previous experiences, existing needs and gaps along with recommendations for further progress. Interviews with government agencies and non-governmental organisations provided useful information regarding current policies, services available for refugees and existing gaps in services. The interview questionnaires for agencies and organisations are in Appendix Three.

The focus group interviews were initiated through the use of key questions (semi-structured) identifying themes relevant to the research topics. Prompts were used to sustain the dialogue and encourage the participants to elaborate on the contents of the topics. Priority was given to establishing a rapport with the participants. Personal questions were avoided during the focus group interviews and were replaced instead by the use of generic questions.

The interviews and discussions with respondents in individual and focus groups were conducted in a style that encouraged the participants to articulate their experiences regarding the way refugee communities responded to the various constraints they faced during the refugee period, after arrival in New Zealand, and the

mechanisms they used to overcome those constraints. To gain an insightful picture of participants' experiences, case study methods were used where possible, to allow participants to speak for themselves about their experience in their own words, without relying on interpreters.

Interviews with the Afghan respondents were conducted with the help of interpreters. At the outset of the interview, respondents were given a briefing about the purpose of the interview and the process of the research. A research information sheet was provided for each participant. In addition to the assurance of confidentiality as stated on the information sheet, participants were given verbal assurances that the information they gave would be confidential and would only be used for the purpose of the study. Clarification was given to the participants that the research had no relevance to my role as an employee of a government agency.

In addition to the information sheet, those participants from NGOs and government agencies were given consent forms to sign before taking part in any interview. The consent form allowed participants the freedom to withdraw from the process in case they decide to do so at any point.

Each individual interview lasted for 1.5 hours while the duration of focus group interviews approximately 3-4 hours. These time frames include the time allocated to establishing a rapport with the group before starting the interview.

The field data was collected both in the form of notes taken and audiotapes recorded which were later transcribed for analysis. A tape recorder was used only with permission of the respondents. As a researcher, I was very aware of my responsibilities regarding participants' confidentiality prompting me to always ensure the security of data storage.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data commenced upon the completion of the collection of relevant data. The method of data analysis was "constant comparative method" (Maykut and Morehouse, 1999: 176) which is a non-mathematical procedure and is able to identify topics, themes and patterns in qualitative data.

The process of data analysis involved revision of notes and audio tape recording taken from the field, which are both important and relevant to the research.

Kirby and Mckenna (1989 cited in Korac, M, (2001:25) suggest that "To do analysis, the data must be divided into portions that are manageable".

The collected data was then categorised according to themes that emerged from the various interviews. Once the category was established it was easier to cut and paste material under the correct category heading

Potential problems

Women respondents from the Afghan and Somali communities felt intimidated by a male interviewer (because of their cultural background), resulting in there being more women in the focus group interviews than the individual ones

Sometimes women from these cultures feel judged by what they say and therefore choose not to speak at all in front of a man. Consequently 100% gender balance was not possible in interviews. In the individual interview, an Afghan interpreter was employed as I had been cautioned about the likelihood of women remaining silent in front of an unknown man. Some Somali women appeared to feel ashamed to be honest in front of a man whom they already know.

Although the utmost care was taken to avoid asking questions that could raise painful experiences/issues and re-open old emotional wounds, one woman in the focus group interview broke down in tears upon hearing of the experience undergone by another respondent in the focus group.

The quality of information gathered was most satisfactory. The only problems was the reluctance of participants to share their personal experiences; particularly the women because of shyness or fear. Sometimes people were not willing to divulge their true story e.g. people may have changed their identities so feel the need to conceal some experiences or women who had experienced rape could not share this in the interviews. They could say only that generally women were raped without admitting it had happened to them.

One of the men thought it was inappropriate to question the women without a man from their community present and was also concerned about the type of questions appropriate to ask a woman. The women expressed themselves more effectively in a group setting rather than in private interview.

Time was also a constraint. Most people are very busy necessitating evening visits encroaching on my own personal time. However most people were generous with the time they had.

The agencies were less forthcoming. They seemed unwilling to acknowledge their own shortcomings restricting comment to elaborating on funding shortages and issues related to working with the communities.

To gather more information I had to ask specific questions regarding their policies and how they included refugees in the consultative process.

1.5 Thesis Outline:

Chapter Two begins with a background to the emergence of the 1951 Convention on refugees. The chapter also examines literature on refugees and theoretical considerations of concepts of human rights, social justice, social exclusion, disempowerment, marginalisation, underdevelopment, participation, top-down and bottom-up models of development etc from development theory as they relate to refugees and the resettlement process.

Chapter Three analyses and discusses the issues raised in the interviews and literature review relating to the initial flight from home to the nearest country of refuge and the reasons for leaving the home country, the factors governing the decision to flee and life in refugee camps. Chapter four discusses the resettlement needs of refugees in Christchurch, services available, existing gaps and recommendations to address identified gaps and the responsibilities of various stakeholders.

Chapter five discusses how the research finding informs theoretical discussion of refugee resettlement. It also makes recommendations to address the identified gaps along with suggestions for refugee resettlement best practice to New Zealand policy makers, service providers, host society and the refugee communities.