4.5. When refugees stream: Environmental and Political Implications of Population Displacement

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1. The Issue

16.3 million people qualified for international protection and help as "official" refugees at the end of 1994, according to the World Refugee Statistics reported by the US Committee for Refugees. A World Watch Institute report (Kane, 1995) argues that 23 million (4 million in 1994 alone) of 125 million people living outside their native countries are now refugees. In addition to refugees included in the international legal definition - i.e., those who cross an international border for political reasons, such as persecution and conflict - large numbers of other people claim to be refugees. Some 27 million are displaced within their homelands for the same reasons as official refugees. Often these "internal" refugees are even more in need of protection and assistance.

People have also been forced to leave their homelands because of environmental and economic disruption. The number of environmentally displaced people has been estimated to rival, if not exceed, that of official refugees (Jacobson, 1988). Yet these people do not qualify for refugee status and must usually survive however they can. As refugee flows and other forms of forced migration take place with unprecedented magnitude and speed, displaced people utilise the meagre resources available in their resettlement zones, and this frequently creates tensions between newcomers and native populations.

The objective of this study is to examine the environmental and political problems related to the displacement of peoples. To begin with, this study will review the environmental impact of sudden refugee influxes and long-term residency of displaced populations in receiving areas. Next, it will discuss the political implications of refugee flows. It will then examine the cases of Bangladesh and Sudan in order to see whether the interrelations of population displacement, environmental change, and political insecurity specified in the first two theoretical sections are supported by real-world observation. The concluding section will suggest how affected states, international organisations and relief agencies can minimise the environmental and political disruptions caused by forced migration.

2. Environmental Impact of Sudden Flows and Long-Term Residency

Given the magnitude of global environmental damage, the refugee contribution to environmental degradation may be minimal. However, sudden and unexpected increases in population often result in catastrophe for the ecological balance of a region, which in turn may generate economic and social strains. This is true even in the highly industrialised countries of Western Europe and North America, which usually cater far better for the needs of their refugees. According to a 1993 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report, the number of asylum-seekers in Europe and North America rose from 25,000 in 1973 to 550,000 in 1990, yielding a cumulative total of 2.2 million between 1983 and 1990 (Widgren, 1993). The USCR estimates that in 1994 there were over 2.6 million refugees and asylum seekers in Europe and North America. As their economic and social systems are burdened by this influx, Western governments are attempting to close their borders to asylum seekers.

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Yet these developed societies are much less susceptible to the environmental stress triggered by population influx than Third World society where even a relatively small refugee flow can generate enormous pressures. Unfortunately, more and more people have been fleeing into developing rather than developed countries. Most of the largest refugee-producing nations are among the poorest in the world and the majority of refugees are living in the world's most underdeveloped countries The OECD estimates that the number of refugees and internally displaced persons in Third World countries increased from 2 million in the late 1950s to 25-30 million in 1990 (Widgren, 1993). Of the 16.3 million refugees estimated by the USCR in 1994, 84 percent were in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. When countries or economies are divided by income into four categories (low, lower-middle, upper-middle, and high - according to the World Bank's world development indicators based on GNP per capita), 82 percent of the world's refugees are found in low- and lower-middle-income countries (see Table 1).

Half of the 24 countries with the highest proportion of refugees in 1994 are low-income.[2] For instance, 36 out of the 59 low-income countries (61%) are located in Africa and 13 (22%) in Asia, and much of both areas is already experiencing considerable demographic and ecological stress.[3] Since these poorer countries are usually striving to meet the basic needs of their own people, accommodating foreign refugees is a great burden. They usually require large-scale international aid operations to deal with their refugee problems. More than 90 percent of the international refugee aid agencies' annual spending is contributed by OECD member countries such as the United States, Canada, Western European countries, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand (Hakovirta, 1991).

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[2] *The countries with the highest proportion of refugees in 1994 are Guinea, Zaire, Liberia, Burundi, Tanzania, Mauritania, Cote d'Ivoire, Sudan, Uganda, Guinea-Bissau, Central African Republic, Zambia, Jordan, Djibouti, Lebanon, Armenia, Belize, Croatia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Yugoslavia (Serbia/Montenegro), Syria, Kuwait, and Slovenia The first 12 countries are low-income (per capita income of $695 or less) As of December 1994, for example, Zaire (per capita income of less than $695 in 1994) hosted 1 5 million refugees and Tanzania ($110 in the same year) 752,000 refugees, mainly from Rwanda.*

[3] *These countries located in Africa are Mozambique, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, Burundi, Uganda, Malawi, Chad, Rwanda, Madagascar, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Togo, the Gambia, Zambia, Central African Republic, Benin, Ghana, Guinea, Mauritania, Zimbabwe, Cote d'Ivoire, Lesotho, Egypt, Sao Tome and Principe, Equatorial Guinea, Comoros, Eritrea, Liberia, Somalia, Sudan, and Zaire. Those in Asia include Vietnam, Nepal, Bangladesh, Lao PDR, India, Mongolia, Pakistan, China, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Afghanistan, Bhutan, and Cambodia (World Bank, 1995).*

Table 1: Refugee Proportions and Countries/Economies with GNP Per Capita, 1993-1994

Category (countries or economies)	Number of Economies	Total Population, *billions* (% of Total)	Total # of Refugees, *millions* (% of Total)
Low-income	59	3 2 (56%)	0.8 (48%)
Lower-middle-income	68	1.2 (21%)	7.1 (44%)
Upper-middle-income	43	0.5 (9%)	0.3 (2%)
High-income	39	0.8 (14%)	1.0 (6%)
TOTAL	09	5.7 (100%)	16.3 (100%)

[Note to Table 1]

The figures in the table are calculated by the author based on the following sources:

1) The World Development Report 1995 classifies the countries or economies by per capita income groups. Low-income countries are those with a GNP per capita of $695 or less in 1993; lower-middle-income, $696-$2,785; upper-middle-income, $2,786-$8,625; and high-income, $8,626 or more The Bank lists the 132 countries (economies) in ascending order of GNP per capita and separately lists 77 with sparse data or with populations of less than 1 million. All 209 economies from the Bank's list are included in the table.

2) Population estimates for mid-1993 are drawn from the World Development Report 1995 Refugees who are not permanently resettled in the country of asylum are considered to be part of the population of their country of origin.

3) The number and proportion of refugees for 1994 is based on the World Refugee Survey 1995 of the USCR.

Prolonged refugee stays often lead to environmental destruction around refugee camps and settlement areas. The arid Sahel region, which has witnessed the ebb and flow of hundreds of thousands of refugees, suffers as a result from shortages of water and grazing lands. According to a UNHCR assessment based on 1989 figures, an estimated 11 million trees (or 12,000 hectares of forest) in Africa alone were cleared for building refugee shelters during the initial stage of refugee influxes. More than 750,000 Rwandan refugees remained in refugee camps in Goma, Zaire, in March 1995 As the regions close to the camps were deforested for firewood, not only were Goma's 200,000 local people facing environmental destruction, but rare gorillas in the area were also placed at risk.

Although the ultimate causes of environmental deterioration in refugee-affected areas are similar to those in normal communities with high population densities, the effects are more startling. There are several reasons for this:

1) Little Option: Refugee camps are often built in environmentally fragile areas. Normally people can choose where to move, but usually refugees cannot;

2) Little Incentives· Refugees may indiscriminately utilise limited resources in the receiving community because they have few incentives to preserve resources that do not belong to them; and

3) Inadequate Planning: Most host governments regard refugee settlements as temporary and have adopted ad hoc policies which do not include long-term plans such as reforestation.

Consequently, physical environmental conditions around refugee settlements may irreversibly deteriorate, unlike environments permanently inhabited by locals. In addition, most of the 27 million "internal" refugees in 1994 resided in poor Third World countries. Of 32 countries in which more than 100,000 persons have been displaced within the borders of their homelands because of conflict or forced relocation, all but South Africa and Cyprus were low-income (18 countries) or lower-middle income (12).[4]

In summary, the high number and prolonged residence of refugees increases the rate at which land and resources are used up, a process which accelerates environmental degradation. This in turn leads to greater competition between refugees and natives for scarce land and natural resources, and often to further migration. This means that the environmental and/or political crises which produce refugees in one country may well generate other refugee-producing environmental changes and/or conflicts in a receiving nation.

3. Political Consequences of Refugee Flows and Resettlements

Most studies seek to explain how and why conflicts produce refugees. But the opposite process is increasingly important. The refugee problem is no longer a simple humanitarian tragedy; refugees are frequently a real or potential threat to the host's internal stability and a source of interstate tension. The variables listed in Box 1 determine how refugees are involved in or spread conflicts within the recipient country and/or between host and origin countries. As the proportion of refugees to total population of the host country increases, refugees are viewed as "invaders" who deprive the natives of natural resources and grazing land. Refugees require economic services and assistance from the host government; if these must be met from domestic resources rather than through international aid, local resentment may be sharpened. When refugees are kin to a local minority which is in conflict with the host government, there may be internal political repercussions.

On the other hand, if the refugees have nothing in common with the locals, increased interaction and competition for land, jobs, education, social welfare and political participation may increase the likelihood of communal hostility and clashes. Competition with "foreign" groups may exacerbate ethnic, historic, cultural, linguistic, and religious differences. Refugee flows sometimes incorporate guerrilla fighters, or refugee warriors, who exploit sanctuaries as strategic sites from which to launch attacks on their government. Non-combatant refugees may become the unwitting agents as well as the passive victims of conflicts. As the chances of returning home grow slimmer, refugees may become politicised, building their own communities and thus accelerating existing internal instability in the host state.

Box 1. The Seriousness of Refugee Conditions

a) *How Many (magnitude):*
number of refugees relative to the population of the host country;
b) *How Suddenly (emergency):*
sudden and unexpected increase in the number of refugees;
c) *How Long (prolongation)*
temporary versus prolonged or permanent duration of stay;
d) *How Aggressive (characteristics).*
civilian refugees versus militant refugee warriors

[4] *Of the 32, Sudan, Rwanda, Liberia, Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, Zaire, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Mozambique, Somalia, Burundi, Ethiopia, Georgia, India, Kenya, Cambodia, Yemen, and Togo were low-income; Angola, Turkey, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iraq, Azerbaijan, Colombia, Lebanon, Peru, Russian Federation, Croatia, Guatemala, and Philippines were lower-middle income.*

Refugees are sometimes welcomed by the country of first asylum not solely because of ethnic ties or humanitarian compassion but because of a host government's "calculated kindness." A host government may expect large amounts of international relief aid, which it hopes will revitalise its national economy. Refugee populations are often expected to serve as sources of cheap labour, while well-educated or skilled refugees are a valuable asset to the receiving country.

Refugees may also be viewed as an instrument in the pursuit of the host's foreign-policy objectives.[5] Most governments are, however, reluctant to receive refugees not only because they fear demographic and ecological strains or economic dislocation, but also because they do not wish to complicate their relations with the refugees's home country. When the refugees' home country is allied or friendly to the receiving country, the host government may reject refugees as guerrillas or guerrilla sympathisers When the refugees' country of origin is a rival or is hostile, the recipient government may welcome refugees as freedom fighters or harmless victims; but irresponsible fighters in the host country can target refugees and their country of origin as scapegoats for popular discontent.
The result can be a militant nationalism that destroys the co-operative relationship that once existed between neighbouring countries. Additionally, the fact that refugees have fled violence and conflicts does not necessarily mean that they are non-partisan. In order to change the political climate of their country of origin, they may be very politically active, becoming involved in the affairs of their new country or (more furtively) their old one. Their activities are often disruptive of both communities, though they may also can serve as a positive influence in democratising their home countries. Among refugees there may be candidates for negotiators and peacemakers to manage, if not resolve, the conflict they fled.

For host countries, the ultimate solution to refugee situations does not lie in shutting the door on them or in forceful repatriation. Refugees will still cross the border, but this time in more clandestine and destructive ways. In order to prevent the conflict that the refugees fled from becoming a regional conflict and, more constructively, in order to eliminate the reasons for refugee flight, both host countries and the international community should not only provide refugees with appropriate protection and assistance, but should also help them play a positive role in building peace in their home country by integrating them into routine political processes

4. The Case of Bangladesh

4.1. Bengali settlers and tribal people in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT)

The problem of the CHT originated in a Bengali influx into the CHT lands. To Bengalis, stricken by overpopulation, land pressures, frequent natural disasters (floods and cyclones) and few natural resources, the CHT was seen as a "land of opportunity." Many Bengali settlers on the CHT lands can be labelled:

1) economic/distress/compelled migrants (those seeking a less harsh way of life, driven by the need for food, land and work);

2) Malthusian refugees (those fleeing from their homeland because they cannot survive overpopulation pressures); or

3) disaster refugees (those fleeing from the ravages of natural calamities).

Collectively, the above can be considered environmental refugees since their motive of flight is not a matter of choice but sheer necessity for survival. The government's resettlement program further encouraged the inflow of these Bengali environmental refugees into the CHT, with the aim

[5] *For a detailed discussion of the host's responses to refugee influx and of conflicts between host and source countries, see Lee (1994), pp 112-119*

of diluting the CHT Adivasis population to counter the guerrilla activities of the Shanti Bahini. An estimated 500,000 environmentally displaced Bengalis have been settled in the CHT (Islam, 1992). Ironically, the root cause of the Shanti Bahini's insurgency (since 1973) is traceable to the continuous encroachment of Bengalis sponsored by the government and a deliberate policy of displacing tribes.

The result is a continuing cycle of violence and counter-violence as settlers and the army fight the tribal Shanti Bahini. Bengali refugees have often served as "human shields" in battle with the Shanti Bahini. Some of these refugees are equipped with government-provided arms, but most of them are defenceless and vulnerable to slaughter by guerrillas. Still, many Bengalis consider living in the CHT a "tolerable danger" compared with the extreme poverty, hunger, and environmental destruction they left behind. Meanwhile, the plight of tribal people, faced with the loss of land and political power and confronted by counter-insurgency manoeuvres, has been more profound. While the main goal of Shanti Bahini guerrillas has been the removal of all settlers from their lands, the rebels and their families have become political refugees (mostly Chakmas) in the course of the conflict, fleeing to Tripura State in north-east India

The condition of refugee camps in Tripura is dismal. Many camp dwellers have not been given a registration card, and therefore have received no appropriate relief aid. Food supplies have been insufficient and rations often do not reach the camps. Access to water and medical supplies, as well as sanitation facilities, have been problematic. Between 1987 and 1992, nearly 8,000 Chakma refugees died of hunger, epidemics, and water-borne diseases (including over 1,000 refugees in early 1990). An estimated 90 percent of the children in the camps suffered from disease (USCR, 1993). Almost all attempts by international agencies and non-Indian citizens to gain access to the camps have been thwarted. Since India is not a signatory to the UN Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, the UNHCR does not have access to the camps, so no international protection for the refugees exists and little NGO aid has reached them.

Furthermore, the presence of CHT refugees in Tripura has had spill-over effects, both in terms of internal insecurity within India and growing tensions between India and Bangladesh. Communal infighting and insurgencies have long plagued India. Many tribal people, particularly those in north-east India, have engaged in insurgency to demand their autonomy and to prevent being overwhelmed by non-tribal settlers. The Tripura province (where most Chakma refugees are) is no exception. Since the 1950s, the tribes of Tripura have been outnumbered by settlers and have lost most of their lands to Bengalis. The influx of Chakma refugees has heightened land pressures and tribal resentments in Tripura. Furthermore, Chakma refugees were accused of providing shelter to insurgents of the Tripura National Volunteers, so the Indian government isolated the refugee camps in 1989 and restricted food rations to those refugees with registration cards. In 1991, India launched "Operation Push-Back" to forcibly repatriate those who had already settled in India. Political tensions between Bangladesh and India have risen as the Chakma refugee warriors continued operations from their havens inside Tripura.

Since President Ershad signed a repatriation agreement with India in 1982, thousands of refugees were reportedly repatriated by 1985 and smaller numbers in every year since Bangladesh has promised their safe repatriation, rehabilitation and protection, but many returnees found their homes and possessions appropriated by Bengali settlers and had little alternative but to find shelter with relatives and friends, die of starvation or flee again. In January 1994 the governments of India and Bangladesh agreed on a concrete plan to repatriate Chakma refugees in Tripura. Most refugees refused to return until the UN guarantees protection, fearing persecution, harassment, or annihilation at the hands of the army At the end of 1994, an estimated 48,300 Chakma refugees remained in Tripura after 5,200 were repatriated during the year (USCR, 1995) Even if the refugees eventually agree to repatriation, another problem remains to be solved. While Bangladesh has insisted that their number is around 30,000, India has given a list of 53,400 refugees to Bangladeshi officials. If this dispute over the number of refugee remains unsettled, Bangladesh's refusal to accept more than 30,000 refugees will collide with India's determination to return all refugees, thus imperilling future Indo-Bangladeshi relations.

4.2. Rohingya Myanmar refugees along Bangladesh border

Since late 1991, environmental pressures on Bangladesh have been heightened by the massive Rohingya refugee inflow from the north-western Myanmar state of Arakan, escaping widespread ethnocide committed by the Burmese military. Although 10,000 of 220,000 Rohingyas refugees died of hunger due to the failure of food distribution in Bangladesh in 1978, the joint efforts of the Bangladesh government, UNHCR and NGOs coped creditably well with more than 225,000 Rohingya refugees during 1991 and 1992. Despite its own hardship (e.g., limited resources and seasonally devastating storms), Bangladesh initially tried to cope on its own since ethnic Rohingya Muslims are closely related to Bengalis As the number of refugees increased, however, the Bangladesh government promptly requested international aid and accepted UNHCR help, even though the country is not a signatory to the UN Convention and Protocol.

The UNHCR released US$ 6 million in emergency funds and airlifted blankets, hospital tents, and other needed relief supplies. WHO, UNICEF, OXFAM, Save the Children Fund and other NGOs helped construct shelters, truck in water and conduct a vaccination campaign (UNHCR, 1992). Yet even such prompt responses could not alleviate the crisis. As the number of Rohingya refugees exceeded the absorption capacity of the area, and the early repatriation of refugees to Myanmar failed, resentment among the Bangladeshis who lived and farmed around the camps arose. While more than half of the country's population is landless, 670 hectares of government (common) land were utilised to accommodate refugees (The Christian Science Monitor, April 23, 1992). Inability to handle the refugees drove the Bangladesh government to reduce the refugees' daily food rations to unacceptably low levels and commence forcible repatriation (USCR, 1993).

Meanwhile, conditions in the congested refugee camps have been serious. Environmentally damaging behaviour on the part of the refugees is usually a result of a lack of alternatives. Since the resources, infrastructure, and services in Bangladesh could hardly meet the needs of its own people, Rohingya refugees, for their survival, have exploited the meagre resources available in the regions close to their camps and resettlement sites. Also, large concentrations of Rohingyas in disaster-prone environments have exacerbated their own predicaments and placed an enormous burden on relief organisations. In 1992, only 57 percent of the 225,000 refugees were under shelter in the camps between Cox's Bazaar and Teknaf along Bangladesh's border with Myanmar. Relief workers were racing against time to accommodate the refugees who lacked shelter as the cyclone season approached, especially since the refugee sites were close to the areas where a calamitous cyclone struck in 1991.

When a major cyclone battered Bangladesh in May 1994, improved disaster preparedness limited damage and death in the country, but the 200,000 Myanmar refugees suffered severe damage due to lack of shelters or evacuation plans (IFRC and CRED, 1995). Half of all the housing in the camps was destroyed by the cyclone, leaving at least 37 refugees dead, 600 injured, and over 100,000 without shelter. Despite tensions between refugees and locals, forcible repatriations and precarious natural conditions in their country of asylum, most refugees feared continuing abuses against Rohingyas in Myanmar and opted for remaining in Bangladesh. At the end of 1994, 116,000 Rohingyas were living in the camps (USCR, 1995).

5. The Case of Ethiopian and Eritrean Refugees in Sudan

Of the approximately 550,000 refugees currently in Sudan, the Ethiopians and Eritreans residing in the country's eastern provinces form the largest group (98%). The refugee crisis in Sudan was linked to the situation in Ethiopia. The armed conflict between the Ethiopian government and the Eritrean Front pushed some 30,000 Eritrean refugees into eastern Sudan (particularly Kassala) in 1967 The number of refugees increased rapidly in the wake of the Ethiopian revolution of 1974, which resulted in the military junta, the escalation of the war in Eritrea, and the spread of conflict to other parts of Ethiopia. New refugee flows included diverse ethnic and political groups from

Ethiopia who fled into Sudan along the entire border from the Upper Nile and the Red Sea. Warfare in Ethiopia had escalated in the late 1970s, multiplying the number of refugees from 56,300 in 1974 to 490,000 in 1981. In the towns around Kassala, every fourth persons was a refugee (Ek and Karadawi, 1991).

The political refugee crisis was compounded by the concurrent horrendous drought and famine which struck Ethiopia, particularly in the north, in 1984 and 1985. The refugee numbers in Sudan peaked at 1.1 million in 1985 owing mostly to an influx of over 1,000 Eritreans per day during 1984-1985 (UNHCR, 1988). Refugee numbers declined somewhat during the second half of the 1980s, not because the war situation in Ethiopia was eased but because precarious conditions in Sudan (civil war, political repression, droughts, and famine) forced many Ethiopian refugees to return. But intensified fighting in 1989 and 1990 once again triggered a refugee exodus from Eritrea and Tigray. The downfall of Mengistu Haile Mariam's military government in May 1991 also directly affected the refugee situation of Sudan, generating a new wave of Ethiopian refugees, consisting of 50,000 ex-government soldiers and their families who had been based in Eritrea.[6]

With the continual increase of Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees, theattitude of the traditional Sudanese hospitality has changed to "enough is enough!." At first, the flood of Eritreans put pressure on the weak Sudanese economy, rather than adding labour or skills. About 76 percent of the refugees are women and children under 15; children between 5 to 14 constituted 35 percent of the refugee community (UNHCR, 1992). Refugee children burdened the Sudanese school system, especially in refugee-populated provinces like Kassala, where refugee children in schools represented almost the half the total (Bulcha, 1988).

The perception of these refugees as a burden was especially apparent in the mid-1980s when Sudan was struck by the same disastrous Sahel drought that had already prompted a large influx of refugees from north-west Ethiopia into Sudan's eastern provinces. The presence of refugees drained local food supplies and caused a rise in food prices, making wage labourers unable to survive on their earnings. Refugees were provided emergency food aid faster and more effectively than were the locals, who also needed help desperately. Refugees often sold food at a lower rate to purchase other basic goods, which decreased food prices and impelled local farmers to drop their prices. Naturally this resulted in local resentment against the refugees Refugee pressures also occasioned health hazards, not only because of inadequate medical facilities but also because refugees carried epidemics and infectious diseases to locals

The detrimental environmental effects were greatest in the receiving areas as result of population concentration, overuse of water, over-cutting of trees for shelter or cooking, and over-exploitation of grazing lands These adverse environmental consequences of refugees are also attributable to the emergency character of refugee phenomena which has obstructed appropriate planning of the new habitat. For instance, when the number of Ethiopian refugees was soaring in the mid-1980s, an estimated one billion gallons of water per year was consumed by refugees. This aggravated serious water shortage in arid north-eastern and central Sudan Competition for scarce resources and services in the host society triggered conflict between the refugees who attempted to acquire resources and the Sudanese who wished to monopolise resources to maintain their living standards.

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[6] More than 100,000 Eritrean refugees have been repatriated (including 40,000 in 1994) since Eritrea became a sovereign state in May 1993 This voluntary repatriation has reportedly increased, some being encouraged by peaceful gestures by the new Eritrean government and others prompted by unstable conditions in Sudan An estimated 26,000 Ethiopian refugees were also repatriated from Sudan throughout 1993 and 1994, and 75,000 more Ethiopians are expected to eventually be repatriated. To return to a home which was a war zone for 30 years, however, is not an easy task. Devastated by decades of armed conflict, drought, economic decay and environmental destruction, the homeland situation has neither infrastructure such as roads, schools, and medical clinics nor supplies such as shelter, water, food and firewood. Given the long-time exile, reintegration of refugees into their home societies is very hard, particularly for children who were born and raised in exile.

The large number of refugees often frustrated relief efforts. According to a UNHCR document (2 April 1993), only half of the 730,000 Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees in 1993 were receiving assistance from UNHCR in 26 camps and 5 reception centres in eastern Sudan. Those unassisted were located in self-settled rural areas or in major Sudanese cities such as Kassala, Gedraref, and Port Sudan in eastern Sudan and the capital city of Khartoum, where they competed with other refugees from Chad, Uganda, Zaire, and internally displaced Sudanese.

These self-settled peoples without formal relief assistance, often received remittances from relatives or friends living abroad, usually inadequate for their support. In short, in the face of a massive influx of refugees since the late 1970s, particularly during the famine of 1984 and 1985, the Sudanese refugee policy has shifted from a principle of hospitality to the use of refugees as a magnet for external assistance to meet basic domestic needs. But as external donations fell short of their needs and as warfare within Eritrea spilled over to Sudanese border areas such as Kassala, by the late 1980s Sudan's response to refugees became increasingly negative.

Refugee flows and resettlements not only triggered political and social tensions between locals and refugees but also created political and military tensions between sending and receiving countries. Because the Mengistu regime allowed the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA, the Sudanese rebel forces fighting the northern Islamic government) to administer the camps in Ethiopia, between 1983 and 1991 these camps became focal points for the SPLA's military and political activities. In addition, while southern Sudanese remaining in their home areas suffered, refugees residing at Itang, Ethiopia, enjoyed material support from the international community, which in turn helped promote relief and political strategy for the SPLA. However, such politicisation or militarisation of refugee camps invited military attacks (allegedly from the Sudanese government and anti-Mengistu Ethiopians) and caused the closure of the Itang camp. In response to the Ethiopian government's providing refuge to southern Sudanese refugees (including the SPLA force), Sudan served as a base for Eritreans and Tigrayans who were opposed to Ethiopia's Mengistu regime.

6. Comparative Observations of Bangladesh and Sudan

6.1. Political factors

Political factors have contributed substantially to massive refugee flows and environmental destruction both in Bangladesh and Sudan. Bangladesh's independence war, which was sparked by the genocidal aggression of West Pakistani forces against Bengalis, generated millions of refugees from East Bengal to India in 1970. Post-independence Bangladeshi governments have also failed to accommodate minorities and have encouraged Bengali resettlement into the CHT instead, thus driving the dispossessed indigenous people to the Shanti Bahini insurgency in 1975. After the Bangladeshi government launched a counterattack against the rebels in 1979, some 50,000 CHT tribals fled to Tripura. As a whole, Sudan's decade-long civil war is characterised as an ethno-religious conflict. Unless Shari'a (Islamic) law is repealed, the conflict between the northern government and southern rebels will not be resolved by non-military means. Also, fighting between Dinka tribes and non-Dinkas within the south has emphasised the ethnic feature of the war. Even if the north-south war ends in the south's secession or defeat, the south will probably fall prey to tribal clashes.

6.2. Environmental factors

These multi-dimensional conflicts require different approaches from those takenin most academic literature and in the media. Aspects of eco-conflict (a process by which people take collective action, non-violent or violent, to protect themselves when they perceive that their well-being or survival is threatened by environmental change, combined with unequal distribution of scarce resources and social goods) have been noticeably protracted by the Sudanese ethno-religious war, making it a more intractable conflict. Severe dry-land degradation has long been an threat

to the livelihoods of northern Sudanese and eventually caused them to relocate southward. The country's water scarcity has resulted in population pressures and land over-exploitation, escalated competition for resources and intensified ethnic hostility in central Sudan: the more severe the environmental stress and competition among affected populations, the more ethnically self-conscious and self-assertive they will become.

These tensions have been largely attributed to policy failure or the failure of politics. Government inaction (or inadequate performance) in response to drought- or war-related famines, and the blocking of emergency food relief, has turned famine into a major humanitarian issue around the world. Government action has also been responsible for the ecological aspects of Sudan's crisis. Advantaged groups such as government leaders and wealthy landlords monopolised resources, leading to a chain effect of environmental destruction, economic decline, social disintegration, population displacement (internal and environmental refugees), and protracted conflict. In brief, the Sudanese experience suggests that environmental decline and eco-conflict are an important factor in protracting ethnic disturbances, even if not a primary source.

In comparison, the case of Bangladesh provides a clearer example of how environmental decline and social tensions result directly from population density. Overpopulated areas generated extreme land pressures, economic privation, and vulnerability to natural disasters, inducing Bengalis to migrate to the CHT region in south-eastern Bangladesh. But relocation did not provide a solution, and instead caused a collision with tribal peoples who traditionally resided in the areas, escalating after 1975 into a violent ethnic conflict. The resentment of tribal people against Bengali encroachment on their lands has obscured differences among different tribes (about 27 to 36) and consolidated their pan-tribal group identity, thus triggering rebellion against the "Bengalization" of their lands.

6.3. Refugee factors

In Sudan, the refugee crises - both the exodus of Sudanese and the influx of foreigners (e.g., Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees) - were more closely related to politically-induced humanitarian tragedies than to environmental insecurity in settled areas. Refugee flight is closely related to the political situation (civil war, inter-state conflict, regime change, and persecution) in the country of origin. Ethiopian and Eritrean refugee "floods" in eastern Sudan were less a source than a result of conflict. But their protracted presence has often been perceived as a threat to Sudanese political stability Massive refugee influxes (both foreign and internally displaced) have caused detrimental environmental effects in arid north-eastern and central Sudan due to population concentration, overuse of water, over-cutting of trees, and land over-exploitation. Also, drought- and famine-stricken environmental refugees (fleeing from Sudan, to Sudan, or within Sudan) often fled their habitats when political and environmental disasters occured simultaneously. For instance, Sudanese refugee flows generated by the civil war have been exacerbated by environmental degradation due to drought and to large-scale mechanised schemes In addition, refugee-producing environmental destruction has often resulted from wars and "ecocide".

In the meantime, Bangladeshi refugees have played an active role in shaping ethno-political conflicts at both the intra- and inter- state level. Within the country, overpopulation, poverty, and flood-stricken environmental refugees (mostly Bengalis), both through government resettlement and their own volition, were the principal source of conflicts in the CHT. Across the border, millions of Bengali environmental refugees who fled overpopulation and poverty, as well as 50,000 war-stricken CHT political refugees, have not only exacted a heavy environmental toll in India but also promoted or exacerbated ethnic conflicts as demonstrated in the cases of Tripura and Assam. In addition, upstream India's dam projects (e.g., Farraka Barrage) have disrupted Bangladesh's ecosystem downstream and made the affected people environmental refugees. This new kind of refugee group joined other Bangladeshi refugees who were already in India, thus creating great potential for ethnic conflict throughout West Bengal

7. Policy Considerations for Emergency Relief

There are three prerequisites for a timely and effective response to a refugee crisis. preparatory planning, immediate relief, and sustained relief. These three phases should not be considered in isolation; an integrated approach is required.

7.1. Preparatory planning phase

Even though they recognise that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, policy-makers and field workers have usually only been able to act like fire-fighters. As forced migration has increased dramatically, particularly in the 1990s, it has been very difficult to respond to ongoing refugee crises, let alone anticipate new ones. And yet predicting and preparing for refugee crises can substantially reduce their negative impacts.

a. *Early Warning of "Trouble Spots":*
Reliable models of and data on preventive action in conflict-related humanitarian crises can serve as an early warning system to alert government leaders, officers of international organisations, and other related agents to potential trouble spots - areas where a problem of population displacement appears imminent. For a "good" early warning, plausible models should be empirically tested by reliable data and complemented by detailed case studies, since models based on abstract theory are likely to generate false alarms. Standard formats, or common languages, are also required for effective information exchange. In addition, NGOs can help reduce refugee problems by flagging "invisible" indigenous groups who are at imminent risk.

b. Environmental Risk Assessment:
Once potential trouble spots are identified, the physical conditions of the areas into which uprooted people are likely to flee should be assessed by environmental and local experts. If a receiving site is environmentally sensitive, immediate and long-term (or cumulative) effects on the environment should be part of strategic planning to accommodate refugees. A detailed region by region assessment of environmental conditions is a pre-requisite for the selection and planning of a refugee camp site.

c. Comprehensive Refugee Categorisation:
Identifying those who qualify for refugee status will help determine the extent of assistance required in an emergency. The lack of "official" definition for the internally and/or environmentally displaced in international conventions has contributed to the lack of a formal organisation or institution that effectively serves their needs. Where the destitute flee from a "leave or die" situation, rigid criteria for determining refugee status seem inappropriate and inhumane.[7] Therefore, when it comes to recognising population displacement (political, environmental, or both), refugees in camps, spontaneously settled refugees, internally displaced peoples in camps, and spontaneously settled internally displaced peoples should be considered all together.

d. Co-ordinating Machinery:
For immediate, effective, and sustained operations, the co-ordinating machinery among the host government, international organisations, and NGOs should be institutionalised (or formalised) in the areas predicted as trouble spots.

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[7] *In fact, those working for refugee camps in Africa have recognised that in practice, the victims of civil conflicts and environmentally displaced persons are often the same people*

7.2. Immediate relief phase

In an emergency situation, with a sudden and unexpected influx of refugees, neither sufficient time nor expertise may be available for detailed relief planning. Still, establishing priorities beforehand is essential, even though they will need to be adapted to each locality and situation.

a. Standard Emergency Response.
In all cases, immediate assistance should first be given for basic human needs, e.g., food distribution, shelter construction, and drinking water supply. Urgent measures should also be taken to establish sanitation facilities to prevent the incidence of malaria, diarrhoea, and other diseases. These standard emergency relief measures make up the "humanitarian mandate," which should not yield to any other consideration.

b. Environmental Concerns in Emergencies:
Local environmental experts should be part of the emergency relief team. Evaluation of the medium- and long-term environmental impact of displacement needs to be conducted during the early stages of relief aid, particularly when the emergency situation looks likely to be more than temporary.

c. Equal Care for all those in Crisis:
While the search for an adequate definition for refugees is important, internally and environmentally displaced people should be given the same priority as official (political) refugees in emergency relief activities. It is equally important that relief efforts should include local inhabitants in affected areas. Compensation and substitution of resources for local populations is as important as ensuring prompt and efficient relief for refugees.

d. The Size and Location of Refugee Camps and Settlements:
Building smaller refugee camps in accordance with the absorption capacity of local environmental conditions (rather than one big camp) will help minimise adverse effects on physical environments and lessen the burden of host governments, local populations, and relief providers. Refugee camps and settlement sites need to be selected where sufficient cropland, wood, and groundwater resources are available.

e. Recognising Mental Anguish:
Even in emergencies, provision for the mental health of displaced people is important. Environmentally damaging behaviour on the part of the refugees can be due to trauma arising from what they have been through (e.g., losing their homes and witnessing the killing of family members and friends). Allowing refugees to retain elements of their traditional culture may be as important as helping meet their basic physical needs. For instance, a study on Ugandan refugees in Sudan in the early 1980s indicates that providing resources for the burial of the dead had to be given higher priority than providing emergency relief aid (Keen, 1992).

f. Media Alert:
The international media should play a more substantial role in reporting on refugee problems. Often, donors and aid providers are greatly influenced by the nature and length of media coverage.

g. Sharing the Burden:
To share responsibility for protecting the host environment during the emergency phase, development-related organisations such as the World Bank and the UNDP can supplement overall relief efforts through the host government, the UNHCR, and aid agencies. For instance, it is encouraging to note that the Global Environmental Facility (GEF), implemented by the World Bank, the UNDP, and the UNEP,[8] provided US$ 250,000 as urgent assistance to preserve the biodiversity of the Virunga National Park, in Zaire, where Rwandan refugees concentrated.

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[8] *The GEF has helped developing countries integrate environmental considerations into their national development objectives by providing grants and concessional funds to projects which protect the global environment.*

7.3. Sustained relief phase

Despite the fact that "the longer they last, the more prolonged are the refugees' difficulties and the more they put a strain on the resources of asylum countries, aid organisations, and the international community" (Harkovita, 1991, p.38), safe repatriation of millions of refugees has been thwarted by intractable conflicts or continued brutal governance. When responding to the extended stay of displaced communities, detailed, comprehensive strategies for reconciling humanitarian relief with environmental protection in host communities are required.

a. Raising Awareness of Environmental Problems:
Large-scale efforts are necessary to educate displaced populations about the importance of maintaining their environment. Refugees are not usually highly motivated in this regard since the environment in which they reside does not belong to them. Refugees should be shown the significance of environmental degradation, which often drives refugees and natives into competition for scarce land and natural resources and forces one or the other to migrate. Ironically, the search for solutions to environmental degradation and/or political crisis in one region may sometimes generate refugee-producing environmental changes and/or conflicts in the receiving society. Environmental education should not only promote awareness among displaced populations about environmental problems but should also provide them with practical training such as methods of fuel-saving cooking and the use of efficient stoves.

b. Cost-Effective Operations:
To relieve budgetary constraints, it may be desirable to modify already existing relief structures and co-ordinate their activities, rather than create new and independent projects to address environmental questions.

c. Relief to Development:
It difficult to transform temporary relief into long-term development aid for both refugees and local people. If the refugee crisis is prolonged, host countries and international communities should not only provide refugees with appropriate protection and assistance, but should also help them play a positive role in promoting development by training refugees in tree-planting techniques and encouraging them to participate in tree planting in affected areas. In addition, refugees (especially women who form the majority of displaced populations) should be involved in the decision-making structures of the environmental restoration process itself.

d. Planning for Repatriation:
Voluntary and safe repatriation of refugees should be considered even at the start of mass movement. Repatriation is often delayed because of financial or logistical difficulties This underscores the need for rehabilitation programs jointly implemented by host and origin countries and the UNHCR-led international organisations

e. Clean-up of Camps:
The cleaning-up of garbage such as plastic bags and discarded clothing, waste water, and latrines after refugees return home can be a major problem. Relief activities should include a strategy to reduce waste problems by regular garbage collection and appropriate disposal of solid waste by landfill.

8. Concluding Remarks

In the face of urgent, humanitarian needs of displaced populations in emergencies, environmental concerns may appear to be a luxury. Focusing on displaced populations in the emergency phase, one also tends to overlook the local people living around refugee crossing areas. In many cases, however, the refugee population density in camps and settlement sites exceeds the carrying capacity of the host environment, creating serious environmental degradation which in turn may cause another form of population displacement. With environmental impact of displacement of population in mind, strategies for securing livelihood environment both for the displaced and local people should be found as early as possible during emergencies.

Environmental decline often has "chain effects," or cumulative effects: one disaster may invite another For instance, massive deforestation in refugee-concentrated areas could, if not controlled, lead to soil erosion, water runoff, climatic change, destruction of ecosystems, and drought. Also, environmental disruption also involves a "time penalty": the later the intervention, the less effective the effort becomes. A delay of just a few years in implementing appropriate measures against environmental deterioration can make the recovery of a damaged environment excessively long and costly, if not irreversible. In light of the growing humanitarian and environmental concerns of our times, international community-led intervention in refugee-producing political problems and environmentally damaging policies should be expanded, even if this means challenging the territorial and political sovereignty of the states involved.

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