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WAR IS A
BIG BUSINESS
IN
COLOMBIA,
BUT WHO IS
INVOLVED?



Development Magazine

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Development Magazine

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Cover Photo: An Afghan refugee child works as a trash picker in a Pakistani suburb. It is estimated that there are more than three million Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

Photo: Syed Naseer Abbas/ GSDM



GLOBAL SOUTH

Development Magazine

A Development Quarterly

A magazine where ordinary people become reporters...



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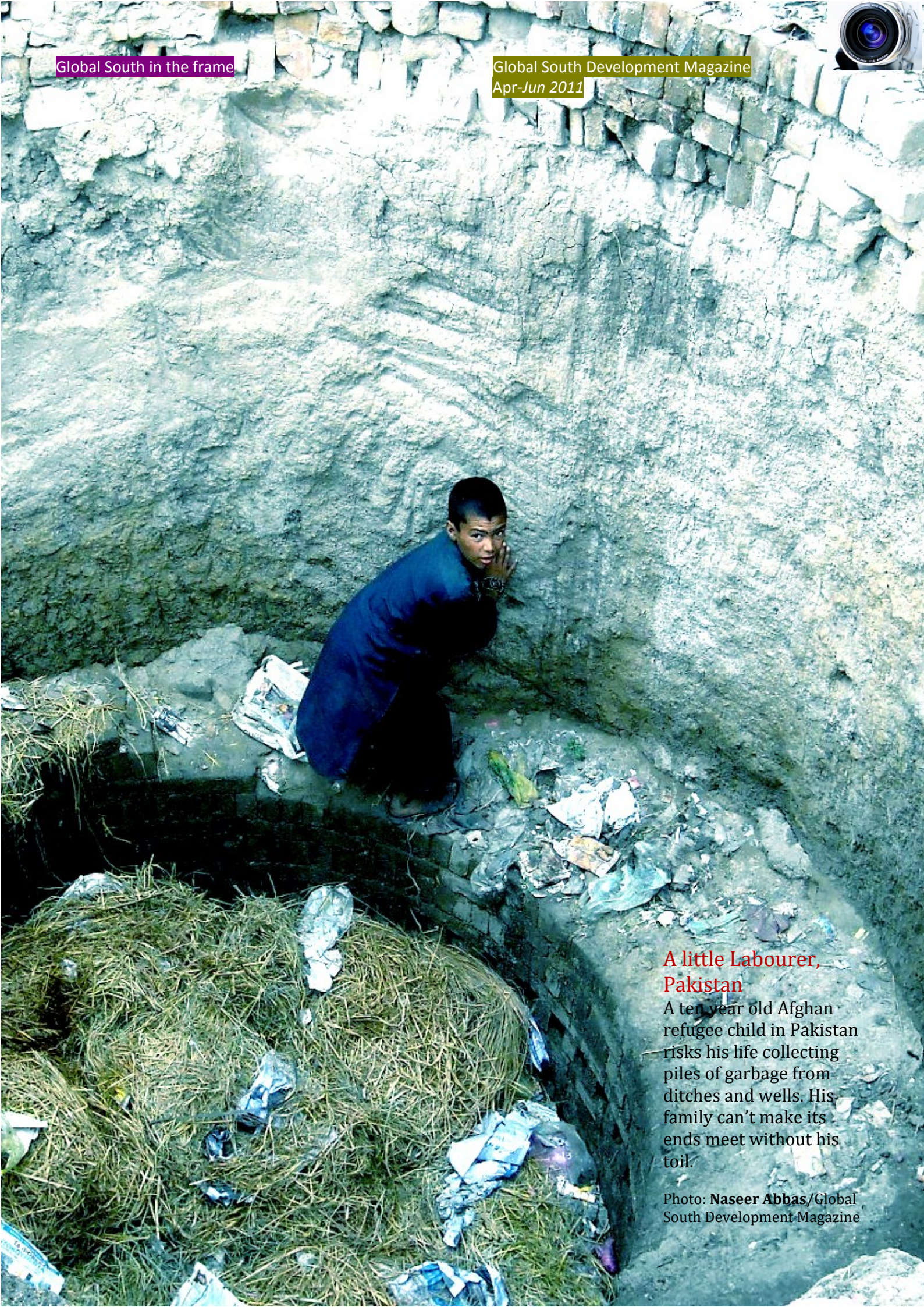
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From the Editor



**A little Labourer,
Pakistan**

A ten year old Afghan refugee child in Pakistan risks his life collecting piles of garbage from ditches and wells. His family can't make its ends meet without his toil.

Photo: **Naseer Abbas**/Global South Development Magazine

SWAZILAND: No hospital care for cancer patients



More than 300 Swazi cancer patients being treated in South African hospitals have been repatriated according to the Cancer Association of Swaziland, (CANASWA), after the government of King Mswati III could not meet their medical costs

MBABANE, 24 June 2011 - More than 300 Swazi cancer patients being treated in South African hospitals have been repatriated according to the Cancer Association of Swaziland, (CANASWA), after the government of King Mswati III could not meet their medical costs.

Swaziland is experiencing acute financial pressures. "The entire fleet of [government] cars, except for emergency vehicles" and those used by the security services, has been grounded, said an official who declined to be identified. The other exception is transport for Mswati, sub-Saharan Africa's last absolute monarch.

The government is the country's largest employer. Social services are being cut and public servants may not be paid after the end of June 2011. One fuel supplier alone is owed R17 million (US\$2.42 million) and the lack of transport is constraining the activities of government personnel from agricultural field officers to health service providers, the official said.

The Ministry of Agriculture reported on 23 June that there is a 29,000 ton shortfall in the annual maize requirement - the country's staple food - of about 114,000 tons, which will be filled by imports, but did not say how this will be financed.

No chemotherapy

Most of the cancer patients in South Africa were recipients of a special fund for the poor - in the absence of a national health system - but Health Minister Benedict Xaba told parliament

recently the fund was exhausted.

"Unfortunately, we do not have the chemotherapy equipment to truly treat these patients," Timothy Vilakati, from CANASWA, told IRIN. "Normally, we refer such patients to South Africa, but that has been suspended because of government's economic crisis."

The Swaziland Hospice at Home, located in the industrial town of Matsapha, about 30km east of the capital, Mbabane has been assisting. "What we do is provide pain therapy. We have the drugs, like morphine, which we administer at the patients' homes. Most of our financing has come from government, so we really must look more to our international donors," Vilakati said.

Finance Minister Majozi Sithole said a loan application to the African Development Bank had been declined. South Africa's deputy finance minister, Nhlanhla Nene, has confirmed that Swaziland approached them for a loan, but not the amount requested. South Africa is struggling with extremely high unemployment.

"Any consideration of a bail-out must be linked to the demand of a new and democratic government," said the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), South Africa's largest trade union federation and alliance partner of South Africa's ruling African National Congress (ANC) - and a staunch supporter of Swaziland's pro-democracy movement.

Protests

Dimpho Motsamai, a researcher in the Africa Conflict Prevention Programme at the Institute for Security Studies, a Pretoria-based think-tank, told IRIN that during pro-democracy protests in Swaziland earlier in 2011, South Africa called for dialogue and restraint from the security forces.

The largest anti-government protests in years took place on 12 April 2011 - the 38th anniversary of a decree issued by Mswati's predecessor, King Sobhuza II, which imposed a state of emergency and banned political parties - sparked by the construction of "vanity projects" like a new \$1 billion international airport when there are overwhelming social needs.

In January 2011 the International Monetary Fund (IMF) made a number of recommendations to stave off economic disaster in donor-dependent Swaziland. Chief among them was that the bloated public sector workforce be cut to a more suitable size.

The government announced that it would cut 7,000 public service jobs during 2011, but so far has cut none. Even without the cuts, Swaziland's unemployment rate stands at 40 percent and it is estimated that about a third of the country's one million population depend on the proceeds of public sector salaries.

"People are suffering - we can no longer say we will worry tomorrow"

"Government offered civil servants voluntary retirement pension packages, but no one wants to take government up on its offer because we don't believe there will be money to pay us these pensions," Anthony Dlamini, an accountant with a government ministry, told IRIN.

Attempts to trim salaries were also being rebuffed by trade unions. A three-day strike this week by teachers protesting salary cuts and government spending priorities was suspended by the Industrial Court, but is far from resolved.

Income from the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) has provided around 75 percent of government revenues according to some estimates, but this has declined in recent years, putting acute financial pressure on the public purse.

SACU, comprising Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa and Swaziland, is the world oldest customs union. It applies a common set of tariffs and disproportionately distributes the revenue to member states, providing a lifeline that ensures the economic survival of landlocked Swaziland and Lesotho.

"Many Swazis have family in South Africa. Many of us also carry South African passports. If things continue to deteriorate, it is easy for us to reside with our kin there," said Bethel Simelane, a textile worker in Matsapha.

"We all wonder how we are going to survive financially, and how bad things will get," said Bethel Simelane's sister, Thembi. "People are suffering - we can no longer say we will worry tomorrow." (Source IRIN)

1 Family Without Shelter: Tunisians open doors to Libyan refugees

Since the start of the conflict in Libya, over 300,000 Libyans have crossed into Tunisia through the official border points at Ras Adjir and Dehiba

TATAOUINE, Tunisia, June 2011- When Akim and his family fled their home in Libya's Western Mountains region in mid-April, they had no idea what they would do when they crossed into neighbouring Tunisia.

"We escaped from Nalut in the midst of shelling and fear," he said, holding his five-year-old boy to his chest. "We had no plan on how to get by in Tunisia."

After a four-hour drive, they arrived in Tataouine in southern Tunisia. Akim, 42, stopped to buy breakfast for his wife Dina and their three children, and met Tunisian couple Anwar and Samira in the pastry shop.

Akim recalled the encounter: "He told me, 'If you have no place for the night, you are welcome to stay at my home.' We are lucky. Since the very same day that we arrived in Tataouine, we have got a roof over our heads to protect us from the sun and a bed for the night."

He was expressing his relief to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres, during a visit to Tunisia last week ahead of World Refugee Day.

Since the start of the conflict in Libya, over 300,000 Libyans have crossed into Tunisia through the official border points at Ras Adjir and Dehiba. Many have since

returned. Currently, some 1,500 Libyan refugees are living in camps managed by UNHCR and the UAE Red Crescent in Remada and Dehiba. Many more – an estimated 60,000 – have found refuge with host families in Tunisia's southern regions, mainly in Tataouine and Medenine.

"This is an extraordinary example of solidarity," said Guterres. "There would be no major refugee crisis if refugee-hosting communities were as generous and hospitable as the Tunisian people."

"This is an extraordinary example of solidarity. There would be no major refugee crisis if refugee-hosting communities were as generous and hospitable as the Tunisian people"

Anwar, who is the Director of Tataouine's Informatics Centre for Children, was deeply affected by the mass influx into his town. "Hundreds of Libyans have been sleeping with their families in their pickups on the sides of the main road in the outskirts of Tataouine," he said, shaking his head sadly. "Compassion and empathy are not enough to help my Libyan brothers."

Like thousands of other Tunisians, Anwar and Samira actively engaged in a community-based network to support Libyan refugees in Tataouine. He registered with several local relief associations for his house to be shared with needy Libyan refugees, while Samira started volunteering with UNHCR to help identify those displaced among the local community.



(From left) Tunisians Anwar and Samira welcome UNHCR chief António Guterres as well as Libyan refugees Akim, Dina and son to their home in Tataouine, southern Tunisia

"We are happy we could help by opening the doors of our home to Akim and his family," said Anwar with pride.

UNHCR has committed over US\$3 million in agreements with the Tunisian Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Women's Affairs to support the development of the host community and enhance the reception capacity of existing community services and health infrastructure.

Some 8,000 food packages have been distributed to Libyan refugees living with host families in southern Tunisia. In Remada and Tataouine towns, UNHCR has launched a pilot project with local authorities to contribute approximately \$36 every month to help each Tunisian host family cover the additional costs of water and electricity. By Rocco Nuri in Tataouine, Tunisia, (for UNHCR)

AFGHANISTAN: Virginity-related penalties “extremely unfair”



KABUL, April 2011 - The penalties that Afghan women suffer whenever allegations of pre-marital sex and loss of virginity emerge, including death, are extreme, discriminatory and not in the penal code, activists said.

“I saw a woman who was publically humiliated and tortured because she had allegedly lost her virginity before her wedding night,” said Suraya Subhrang, a women’s rights commissioner at the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC). Extra-judiciary penalties, she added, were prevalent and deep-rooted in the country.

Medical workers are often called in to prove a woman’s virginity – a requirement for women preparing for marriage.

“Virginity and adultery tests are part of our normal work,” said Del Aqa Mahboobi, a medical expert in Kabul. But there are few facilities and a shortage of female experts to undertake very intimate tests.

The tests involve an examination of the vagina to see whether a girl’s or woman’s hymen is intact, but experts say it can be torn by factors other than intercourse. When forced or coerced, according to Amnesty International, virginity tests degrade women and are a form of torture.

But among Afghan communities, failing the test can result in so-called honour killings, an under-reported crime usually carried out by the families and relatives who believe a young girl or woman has brought shame on them.

“Honour killings recognize a man’s right to kill a woman with impunity because of the damage that her immoral actions have

caused to family honour,” the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) reported in December 2010. Such murders, it added, were simply based on deep-rooted cultural beliefs and not on religion.

“Men usually go unpunished for ‘honour killings,’” Subhrang told IRIN. “But could a woman kill her husband for illegitimate sexual relations?”

Honour issues

Raela (not her real name) was forcefully taken to a medical examiner on her wedding night after her husband accused her of losing her virginity and beat her. The examination showed she had lost her virginity long before the marriage and the 22-year-old was handed over to the judiciary for prosecution on charges of adultery.

Raela’s incarceration has devastated her family. They have to pay back almost US\$10,000 to their former son-in-law, which was allegedly spent on the wedding ceremony.

“They have put their house up for sale and decided to leave this neighbourhood because they cannot live with the dishonour,” said one relative, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

While virginity is not mentioned in the country’s penal system and other laws, say activists and lawyers, hundreds of women like Raela unfairly face serious formal and informal penalties for the alleged illicit loss of this cultural requirement. Sexual intercourse outside marriage is a sin under Islamic jurisprudence and the Afghan laws largely derived from it.

“Virginity is a natural stamp,” said Mawlawi Mohammad Qasim, a member of the Supreme Court’s penal bureau. “When it is lost and the reason is proved to be illegitimate sexual relations it implies adultery, which should be punished,” he said adding that an unmarried person caught having sex outside marriage, male or female, could be sentenced to three to five years in prison while married adulterers received heavier penalties.

Unfair penalties

Women’s rights activists say the adultery law has too many problems and is mostly used only against women. In some cases, the women are victims of rape.

“The law does not clearly distinguish [between] rape and consensual sexual intercourse and treats rape victims as criminals and adulterers”

“The law does not clearly distinguish [between] rape and consensual sexual intercourse and treats rape victims as criminals and adulterers,” said Subhrang from the AIHRC.

Although concealed and under-reported, rape is a crime that occurs across the country every day, UNAMA said in a separate report in July 2009. “It is the girl or woman – the rape victim – and not the perpetrator who carries the shame of the crime,” the report said.

Demanding that men too face the law, Sheela Samimi, an advocacy officer with the Afghan Women’s Network (AWN), said: “Can a girl ask [medical experts] to test whether her would-be husband had sex before marriage and when proved wrong would officials prosecute the man as they do a woman?”

With every female victim of adultery, she added, there was a man or men who rarely faced justice. (IRIN)

Who Are We Developing in Development Aid?

Intention and goodwill aside, you cannot understand a lifetime of insecurity by spending a few days without running water.

Emily Cavan Lynch

A few months ago I stumbled onto that golden ticket of freelancers: a job that actually pays. For three weeks, I appeared at the bougainvillea-covered gate of an NGO in Haiti and happily dug into the gruelling work of proposal development. The team was great, the people pleasant and the work engaging. But given its nature, we ended up sitting at desks for much of the day. We were busy, yes, and the time was productive by the usual professional measures. But in a country like Haiti, where the informal economy is still so strong, this type of work continues to feel so out of place. Contrast us and our Excel spreadsheets with the majority of people – more likely to be carrying basketfuls of produce to unload at market, selling soft drinks from tired cardboard boxes, or hustling pedestrians into tap-taps for five *gourdes* a stretch.

The majority of people in developing countries (allow me to state the obvious for the sake of argument), are *poor* (by which I mean that there are few evenings where they go to bed feeling totally secure about how their basic needs – food, water, shelter – will be met the following day), *rural* (by this I mean they are dependent on the land – if they are lucky enough to have land – to bring them food and provide for their livestock, and they are further dependent on the weather and environment to sustain both land and livestock) and *isolated* – either because of lack of education and literacy or lack of electricity or other technological amenities or because of strong cultural norms.

Although I work in development aid, I did not grow up poor; we had plenty of food, we always had a house. Neither did I grow up rural, though I did live in a town of 25,000 right next to Rural and took a lot of healthy ribbing from my farm friends for my ‘city’ ways. Nor was I isolated – either through lack of education or through lack of exposure to the greater world;

much to my mother’s chagrin, we always had a TV.

Which begs the question: who are the people who work in development aid?

Most of them are much like me. They grew up with sufficient material and basic goods, they are literate, they are wealthy beyond comparison next to the world’s majority. Watching us over the years, perched at our desks, I have begun to wonder: how do we expect this type of person – someone who has never once gone to sleep hungry, who has never once had to guess about the right day to plant her crops to catch or miss the rains, who has (only) once been awakened to a birthing ewe bleating in distress (and in my case, that was one ewe of 20, not my only hope of a future) and who knew next to nothing of cultural or geographic or social isolation – be in charge of designing, implementing and evaluating appropriate programmes for developing countries?

The people allocating money and other resources in poor countries are almost never people who actually know what it is to be critically, and crucially, dependent on the whims of the natural world. They are people who, by and large, have never known *viscerally* what it feels like to be living on the rawest edge of material security.



“Watching us over the years, perched at our desks, I have begun to wonder: how do we expect this type of person – someone who has never once gone to sleep hungry, who has never once had to guess about the right day to plant her crops to catch or miss the rains, who has (only) once been awakened to a birthing ewe bleating in distress and who knew next to nothing of cultural or geographic or social isolation – be in charge of designing, implementing and evaluating appropriate programmes for developing countries?”

We do need cultural ambassadors, and we need people who can understand different government norms and technical experts to implement technical programmes. But what I think we need even more than this is for the people who are designing and implementing the development agenda to have a fundamental understanding of the life conditions of the people the programmes are supposed to be serving – not just through learning some words in the local language, hobnobbing with local vendors or spending a few nights in a village in the mountains.

Intention and goodwill aside, you cannot understand a lifetime of insecurity by spending a few days without running water.

Hitting the nail

The moment that I became a better implementer of public health was one afternoon in Rwanda, listening to a woman with AIDS who was living out her final months and trying to tell us about her life.

The woman was perhaps 40 but looked, at the end-stages of her disease, much older. Most of her family had been killed during the genocide in 1994, during which time she was gang raped. She became pregnant from the rape and also contracted HIV, but it was more than a decade before she discovered this.



else. It was about what living with a terminal illness and being terrified of losing your home, your job and your ability to care for your children does to a family.

It was about me, and my family, too.

The agenda of development aid should not be set by resource-rich countries according to their western and global North paradigms. Even more than that, it should not be set by people so far removed from the uncertainty of life that has dominated human existence for most of time.

Give me rural, poor and isolated westerners who have overcome the odds and achieved an education and let us make them programme managers in developing countries and you will see, with or without local language lessons and with or without a glossary of NGO

acronyms, they will get out from behind their desks and go into the field – not through an obligated sense of cultural kindness but because they are, for once, really speaking the same language as the people they are trying to help.

By that time she had had another child, who was also HIV positive. When we met her in 2009 she was dying, and trying to believe that her youngest child was not, in fact, as ill as he appeared to be.

Rwanda is a country that prioritizes privacy. Emotions are rarely exhibited. But on this day, perhaps because my translating colleague was so kind, this woman's mumbled words morphed into a stream of confessions and, finally, into tears. It was shocking to see someone in that country cry publicly; and it was terrible to see the manifestation of such pain.

The woman's son heard his mother's weeping and came in to hold her hand. Then he turned to stare at us, with an expression that was equal parts fury, pleading and pure desperation.

And that was when I got it. The week before I had returned from a hospital visit in the US where the doctors informed us that my own father – after years of failed interventions – had a 50/50 chance of making it through the next operation alive.

sorrows, the

“It is not that educated and well-off people cannot make a difference in development; we are all, no matter our background, accountable to basic principles of human kindness...But there is something searing about growing up in need. And it is something that I do not believe can be learned through a workshop or even a stint working in a desperate environment”

It is not that educated and well-off people cannot make a difference in development; we are all, no matter our background, accountable to basic principles of human kindness. Through our experiences we can always choose humility, and we can always invest in becoming more profound and expansive in our views.

But there is something searing about growing up in need. And it is something that I do not believe can be learned through a workshop or even a stint

working in a desperate environment. We who have the power both to choose the development agenda and to hire the leaders who make that agenda happen have an obligation to the people whose lives are influenced by those choices.

I believe we owe it to these people to send experts and managers and implementers of development aid who, because of their own personal history, really understand what it is to live life on the cutting edge of death.

Because from my own experience I know: at our most profound and desperate moments in life, words may simply fail us. When they do, what we want more than anything is to be able to look at the person who is there, supposedly, to help and know that they are fully qualified to say the two words that go further than any culture or language or nation-specific training can go:

‘I understand.’

(Emily Cavan Lynch is Global South Development Magazine's Country Correspondent for Haiti as well as a public health consultant and freelance writer. She can be reached at emilycavan@gmail.com)

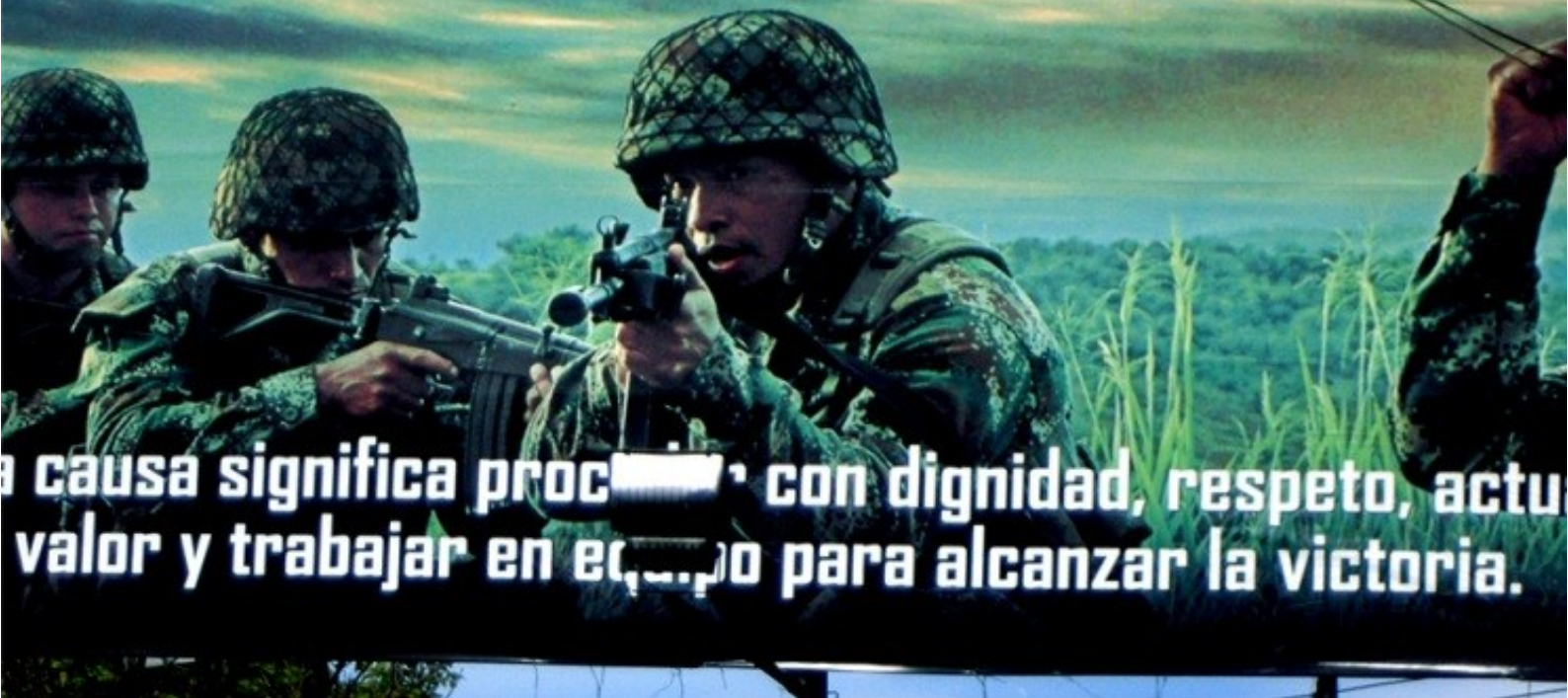
Without weighing relative weeping of the woman in front of me was my stepmother's weeping; and the little boy's look was exactly like the look I gave the poor intern on call that day.

This was a revelation. It was the first time I had understood so clearly that the problem in front of me was not about HIV or about AIDS or about poor people living in Rwanda, or anywhere



Fe en la causa

Comportamiento Ético Superior



Good guy, Bad Guy

*War is Big Business in Colombia,
but who is involved?*

ALIZA AMLANI

Text & Photos

From the moment we are born, a notion of good and bad surrounds us. Even innocent games such as cops and robbers serve to teach us the difference between what is right and what is wrong, a line that divides the two. However, in reality, this theoretical line between good and bad is often blurred. It is in this vein that the current situation in Colombia can be questioned. When one thinks of Colombia, a general vision of rogue guerilla groups cultivating cocaine and kidnapping innocent tourists springs to mind. This article does not intend to take away from the severity of such issues, but

instead tries to bring to light the extremely complex and nuanced situation that really exists with regards to violence in Colombia. Is it simply a product of the bad guy? The "guerillero?" Or rather, a complex interaction of different actors that ultimately includes the law-abiding people we consider "good", the Colombian Government, the national army, multinational companies and Western governments?



Internal Displacement

Colombia has the second highest number of internally displaced people in the world, after Sudan. Over 4 million people have been forced off their land, obligated to live in camps or slums surrounding larger towns. Colombia is extremely rich in natural resources, a literal gold mine boasting reserves of oil, African Palm (used to make biodiesel), emeralds and gold. What is seemingly a positive aspect of this country, unfortunately leads to it being a coveted target of greedy and unforgiving multinational mining companies. "International mining companies are one of the biggest causes of internal displacement in Colombia, there is no doubt about that, they come in and take what they want with no regard for the people who live there. What matters is not who is above the land, but what is below it", says Diana Roa Castro head of the land mine project at Mercy Corps and former employee of UNICEF and the UN in Colombia. Although the displacement of Colombian nationals is all too often blamed solely on the conflict between left wing guerillas and right wing paramilitary groups, the reality demonstrates that international companies play a great role in displacing indigenous communities in order to suck Colombia dry of its natural wealth, whilst using the conflict as a guise. "The afro-Colombian people of Chocó are very aware that

the reason they have been forced off their land is due to the fact that they lived in a resource rich area. They were forced to move by international mining companies who work in collaboration with the paramilitaries and the government who scare them off the land" said Juan Mejia, a documentary filmmaker in Bogota. Just last month an article appeared in Colombian online magazine semana.com about what they termed "The Colombian Avatar", outlining the protest of indigenous communities against a Canadian gold mining company's interest in the region of Vaupes.

Not only is displacement a crisis in itself, it is also a great contributing factor to the ongoing violence in Colombia. There is a high incidence of gender based violence amongst displaced families. Conflict within the family then gives rise to conflict in the wider community. Furthermore, displaced families are poorer and thus more susceptible to sending their children to fight for guerilla or paramilitary groups in order to earn money and better their situation.

"Although the displacement of Colombian nationals is all too often blamed solely on the conflict between left wing guerillas and right wing paramilitary groups, the reality demonstrates that international companies play a great role in displacing indigenous communities in order to suck Colombia dry of its natural wealth, whilst using the conflict as a guise"

"displaced families are poorer and thus more susceptible to sending their children to fight for guerilla or paramilitary groups in order to earn money and better their situation"

Plan Colombia

Another foreign intervention that has caused negative consequences in Colombia is the seemingly moral North American intervention termed "Plan Colombia."

Conceived in 1998 it aimed to end the armed conflict in Colombia, whilst also eliminating coca plantations. The main strategies include fumigation of coca plantations, as well as strengthening of the Colombian army in the aim of combating insurgent groups. The controversy behind these tactics include the fact that aerial fumigation often destroys legal crops and the livelihoods of many farmers, who are then forced to move off their land. Furthermore, the chemicals used in such fumigations are detrimental to the health of those living in surrounding areas.

In reality, fumigation simply does not work, demonstrated by the fact that cocaine production has not been reduced since these efforts began. *"Plan Colombia's fumigation efforts are futile. Think of it like a balloon, if you push air out of one part of the balloon, the air simply fills another part. That is what occurs with coca plantations in Colombia, fumigation of coca in Putumayo has simply led to a surge in cultivation in Nariño,"* (Vicente Gavidia, Head of Doctors of the World, Colombia, May 2011.) In fact the term "efecto globo," the balloon effect, is one used widely amongst Colombian NGO workers, as the effect is so commonly understood as a consequence of Plan Colombia's failed efforts.

The Army

Clinton offered billions of dollars to Colombia under Plan Colombia, \$645 million of which would go solely to the Colombian military and police force in an effort to increase human rights and democracy. Perhaps this can explain why, in Bogota, it is common to see policemen directing traffic at traffic lights that work or groups of



soldiers clustered in groups outside big homes, laughing and eating, their AK47's strapped casually across their chests. However, the fact that this funding may simply be a waste of money is not as troubling as the fact that the army is involved in violation of Human Rights itself, the very thing they are

“The Colombian army was conscripting under-aged boys illegally and without pay and had impregnated 70% of underage girls in the town”

“The confiscation of a laptop owned by a congressman revealed that senior politicians were involved in the design and implementation of massacres orchestrated by the paramilitaries and were also providing them with arms and money in an effort to keep state control of land”

“To prove the money was not a waster, the army men were promised cash and benefits in exchange for killing paramilitary and guerilla soldiers. A series of murders followed, whereby the army killed young boys in poverty stricken parts of Colombia, such as Soacha, a settlement of poor displaced people just outside of Bogota. The murdered young innocent men were then dressed up in paramilitary or guerilla uniforms in order to prove they were successful in their mission and back up their fabricated stories”

relied upon to defend. Diana Roa Castro, head of the land mine Project at Mercy Corps and a former UNICEF and UN employee, carried out research in a small town called Caruru to investigate the basis of *conflicto* in the area, what she found was shocking. The Colombian army was conscripting under-aged boys illegally and without pay and had impregnated 70% of underage girls in the town. They were able to act this way due to the power they had and the arms they owned. Is this what the US government had in mind when it contributed

hundreds of millions of dollars to the promotion of human rights?

Para-politics and False positives

The link between the state and violence does not end there however. It is not just a few groups of soldiers who take advantage of vulnerable communities, but also people in congress and politicians high up the pecking order who have been linked to the spread of violence in Colombia. Rebel groups such as the FARC (Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces) are leftist guerilla forces acting against the state and therefore in opposition to them grew a set of right wing groups called paramilitaries. Unforgiving and lethal, these groups terrorise and kill people with guns, bombs and landmines opting up any means to take control of territory that isn't theirs. In 2006 it was revealed that the Colombian government was inextricably linked to these paramilitary groups. The confiscation of a laptop owned by a congressman revealed that senior politicians were involved in the design and implementation of massacres orchestrated by the paramilitaries and were also providing them with arms and money in an effort to keep state control of land.

So, on the one hand, the Colombian government was strengthening the paramilitary groups in a covert mission to combat the leftist guerillas, using the very same money given to them by the United States to promote democracy and human rights. On the other hand, they were given money to strengthen the military and therefore had to begin to show that the army was successful. To prove the money was not a waster, the army men were promised cash and benefits in exchange for killing paramilitary and guerilla soldiers. A series of murders followed, whereby the army killed young boys in poverty stricken parts of Colombia, such as Soacha, a settlement of poor displaced people just outside of Bogota. The murdered young innocent men were then dressed up in paramilitary or guerilla uniforms in order to prove they were successful in their mission and back up their fabricated stories. The families they belonged to were so poor and marginalised, that real justice was never served. The misconduct and killing of innocent men gave rise to the term “false positive” signifying a false portrayal of the army's success.

So what?

It seems that many more actors than simply the quote on quote “bad” guerillas bear responsibility for the violence in Colombia. The state, in the form of the army and politicians, has been directly involved in the conflict that riddles Colombia. However, it is not a matter of simply blaming a corrupt national government. International intervention is perpetuating conflict and hardship by pumping money and arms into the hands of those not to be trusted. It further adds to the extremely high rate of displacement through fumigation of crops, forcing farmers to move to slums like Soacha. The conflict and displacement of people every day leaves lands rich with oil, gold and jewels at the behest of international mining companies working together with the government. Furthermore, conflict allows for a market for arms, an illicit profiteering economy. As a good Colombian friend of mine once said, “the last thing those in power want is the conflict to stop...war is a big business.” With the United States as one of the largest exporter of arms to Colombia, perhaps she's right.

(Aliza Amlani, GSDM's Special Correspondent for Global Health Issues, is based in Bogotá, Colombia and works for an NGO in psychosocial rehabilitation of displaced people and ex child soldiers. Aliza can be reached at alizaamlani1@gmail.com)

A young child with dark hair and a serious expression is the central focus. They are wearing a green jacket and dark pants, and are carrying a large, light-colored sack over their shoulder. The child is standing on a dirt path next to a concrete curb. The ground is littered with trash, including pieces of paper and plastic. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

What It Means To Be A REFUGEE

June 20, is the United Nations' (UN) World Refugee Day. This event honors the courage, strength and determination of women, men and children who are forced to flee their homeland under threat of persecution, conflict and violence. Inside this issue of Global South Development Magazine, we bring you numerous such stories from different parts of the world and try to explore the fundamental question: what it means to be a refugee.



Refugees No More!



A tripartite agreement between Pakistan, Afghanistan and UNHCR aims to repatriate all the Afghan refugees in Pakistan by December 2012. However, war-torn Afghanistan is still in chaos and there are very little prospects for returnees when they go back home.

KHALID HUSSAIN

Text & Photos

The Economist once famously wrote in 2001, "immigration, it seems, hardens hearts and softens brains like few other issues".

Afghan refugees know how true this is from their personal experience as they have been suffering one of the world's most protracted humanitarian crises that would have been long resolved were it not for an ongoing resistance to accept them as immigrants by the international community.

Pakistan is not a signatory to the UN's 1951 Refugee Convention or its subsequent protocols, meaning there is no clear-cut policy on how to handle refugees in Pakistan where the largest single refugee population in the world has been living for more than three decades!

Refugee numbers have fluctuated in Pakistan with the ebb and flow of conflict in Afghanistan but the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates there are 2.9 million - one in four of all the world's refugees. According to the data collected during August 18, 2010 to March 31, 2011 through National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) some 2.052 million Afghan refugees are living in Pakistan, Pakistan's

Minister for States and Frontier Regions Shaukat Ullah informed the Senate earlier this year. (See Table-1)

Table-1	
Afghan Refugees in Pakistan (in millions):	
Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa	1.201
Balochistan	0.491
Sindh	0.091
Punjab	0.228
Islamabad Capital Territory	0.041
Total	2.052

The latest act of callousness towards the Afghan refugees is the tripartite agreement between Pakistan, Afghanistan and UNHCR, that aims to repatriate all the Afghan refugees by December 2012. Under the present Tripartite Agreement, the Government of Pakistan has entered into an agreement with its Afghan counterpart and UNHCR to accept refugees on its soil until 2012. In other words, there will be no Afghan refugee in Pakistan after 2012.

However, this is extremely unlikely to happen as there is a raging insurgency in Afghanistan in areas from where bulk of the refugees has come. Afghan government institutions such as schools and hospitals remain shuttered in areas hit hardest by the insurgency. Basic facilities such as water and electricity are unavailable. Even most UN departments as well as NGOs also have left these areas. As a result, there are no economic opportunities there. There is a fear that factional fighting in Afghanistan may resume.

Under these circumstances, it is understandable that Afghan refugees do not want to take the risks involved in returning. Whether the Government of Pakistan would resort to pushing them back across the border, negating its stated policy, remains to be seen. Care and prudence, however, not been the hallmark of a policy for the Afghan refugees as adherence to frameworks or deadlines has been in the past.

SECURITY CONCERNS

"The problem of cross-border militancy is closely related to the presence of ... Afghan refugees in Pakistan," Munir Akram, Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, wrote to the UN Security Council in 2007. "These camps have often given rise to complaints that they provide shelter to undesirable elements and Taliban."

His reference was to camps like the Jalozei, 27 kilometers south of Peshawar in northwestern Pakistan. The camp has allegedly incubated several high-profile terrorists, including Ramzi

Yousef, the mastermind of the first attacks on the World Trade Center in 1993, and Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the mastermind of the 9/11 attacks. FBI agents raided the camp in October 2002, arresting four Afghans they said were connected to Al-Qaeda. Jalozei and other refugee camps, which are spread throughout the Northwest Frontier Province and Balochistan, help fuel the Taliban resurgence, the government says.

This is largely the reason why for years, Pakistan government's strategy has focused on the continued large-scale repatriation of Afghan refugees. Last year the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) temporarily suspended repatriation operations from Pakistan because of high security risks to its staff. The numbers of Afghans returning home have also declined significantly in recent years.

There are serious shortfalls in the UNHCR and the Pakistani government's enumeration of the refugee population. Afghan refugees came to Pakistan in five distinct phases but the official agencies only acknowledge two waves: at the start of the Afghan War and then at the start of the Operation Enduring Freedom by America and England in Afghanistan after 9/11.

"There are serious shortfalls in the UNHCR and the Pakistani government's enumeration of the refugee population. Afghan refugees came to Pakistan in five distinct phases but the official agencies only acknowledge two waves"

THE INFLUX

The first group of some 800 individuals actually arrived in Pakistan in 1974. It consisted mainly of "political dissidents" comprised about 800 prominent *ulema*, teachers, political activists, and mostly right-wing ideologues opposed to Daud's liberal policies and Communist leanings. The government of Pakistan welcomed these dissidents as it had serious differences with Daud's pro-"Pakhtoonistan" stance challenging the legal validity of the Durand Line as the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The bigger refugee influx into Pakistan began slowly, imperceptibly at first, in the months following April, 1978, as people mostly from the Afghan Provinces of Kunar, Nangarhar, and Paktia left their homes in hordes following the Soviet takeover of their country. By 1988, a total of approximately 3.3 million Afghan refugees were housed in Pakistan. Close to two

million Afghan refugees went to live in Iran. Many also managed their way into North America, Europe, Australia, and other parts of the world. Several thousand settled in India, mostly Afghan Sikhs and Hindus that became citizens of India over time. Some 2,500 Afghan refugees are also found in Russia and a tiny undisclosed number in Central Asian states of



Mud houses in the 1-12 refugee camp near Islamabad. Photo: Khalid Hussain/GSDM

Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

Initially after the Soviet Union withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989, the refugees began to leave in large numbers. In a span of six months, an estimated over one million Afghan refugees returned to their country. This mass repatriation abruptly halted, however, when Mujahedeen factions began to fight for power in Afghanistan.

“From 1992–1996 there was complete chaos in Afghanistan. Central authority had broken down, fiefdoms had emerged; law and order had collapsed; murders, robberies, and kidnappings were the order of the day. Afghan currency lost its value. The army had disintegrated, and the police had disappeared”

The ferocity and intensity of the factional fighting took all by surprise. Five different groups vied for supremacy in embattled Kabul. One-third of Kabul city was laid to waste, and the remaining portions of the city were substantially damaged. This led to the third wave of refugees mostly from urban areas of Afghanistan. Since this wave of refugees has never been acknowledged by the government in Pakistan or the UNHCR.

From 1992–1996 there was complete chaos in Afghanistan. Central authority had broken down, fiefdoms had emerged; law and order had collapsed; murders, robberies, and kidnappings were the order of the day. Afghan currency lost its value. The army had disintegrated, and the police had disappeared. At every 15 or 20 miles, a new commander held sway. Extortion was rampant. Every commander had his own security forces, paid for by taxes collected in his fiefdom. Inflation was high; unemployment rose to an alarming 90%!

This led to the takeover of the state by the Taliban who first entered Qandahar in October of 1994, and took a major portion of the country south of Hindukush in the next two years. By September of 1996 they had occupied the capital. This led to the fourth refugee influx into Pakistan and consisted mainly of educated Afghan's with liberal values running from the tyranny of the extremist Islamists. This wave was also never acknowledged by Pakistan as it was supporting the Taliban in their takeover of Afghanistan.

And then an unknown number of more Afghans fled their country to Pakistan after September 11, 2001, when the United States and British armed forces attacked Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom. Government estimates put their number around 300,000 but most observers disagree just as they do on the registered number of Afghan's in Pakistan. It is estimated that the real number of Afghan refugees living in Pakistan today is close to three million rather than two.

THE REFUGEES

According to government estimates, there were some five million Afghan refugees in the country by the end of 2001 including those born inside Pakistan since 1979. Another 2.4

million Afghans were staying or living in Iran at this time. This totaled to 7.5 million refugees in the two countries. Some 85% of these refugees are said to be of Pashtun ethnicity. The remaining 15% are Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Baloch, Turkmen, Nuristani, Aimak, Pashai, and others.

Afghan refugees in Pakistan are not a homogeneous group and their conditions differ greatly. Some continue to live in tents, others in mud house settlements that look like the villages they left behind. The majority of them live in rural areas around the Durand Line region with small communities in cities such as Islamabad, Peshawar, Quetta, and Karachi.

Peshawar managed to assimilate many of the ethnic Pashtun Afghans with relative ease. Thousands of Afghan immigrants still reside in various parts of the northwestern frontier city. After Peshawar, the city of Quetta ranks second with the most number of Afghan refugees (11.1 %). Most Afghans in Quetta are engaged in lucrative business and trade activities; they have also bolstered inter-provincial trade and actively go on to work in large urban centres. Balochistan also shares similar demographics with Afghanistan and a large number of the refugees have hence migrated into the province based on ethnic links.

The refugees worked with great energy and dedication wherever they could find employment. The construction industry has been their mainstay. Farming is another sector where they have worked. They do have a good share of the transportation network both in Frontier and Baluchistan. Scores of restaurants were opened in Peshawar, Quetta, and along the main road connecting Peshawar to Lahore. Many of the bread ovens in Peshawar were operated by Afghans. Afghan carpets, manufactured in Pakistan, earned the country millions of dollars each month.

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Responsibility for the Afghan population in Pakistan lies with Ministry of States and Frontier Regions (SAFRON) since 1980. International help came in the shape of UNHCR and the World Food Program (WFP) since the same year. The history of UNHCR in Pakistan has been closely related to the Afghan refugees in the country. For most people in the world, the role of the UN Refugee Agency has since become synonymous with the Afghan refugees who form the world's most protracted humanitarian problems. UNHCR is involved in many activities in Pakistan, running one of its most complex operations in the world. UNHCR provides emergency assistance to refugees, maintain refugee camps for extended periods of time, assists them to repatriate and helps them to be resettled to third countries. UNHCR's education assistance extends beyond working with the government to improve legislation, to

providing instruction to officials and the public on the rights of refugees, does extensive work to educate the public and government officials on the needs of refugees and Pakistan's obligations.

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SCANDULOUS REPATRIATION

That UNHCR has not been very successful in its mission is evident in the most recent repatriation data. It is reflected in the fact that Pakistan also holds the record for the biggest refugee repatriation since 2002-03 when 1.9 million Afghans were sent back to Afghanistan. The 1.5 million who repatriated in 2002 were the largest number of returning refugees anywhere in the world since 1972. A total of 3.5 million Afghan refugees were repatriated by 2007.

The repatriations were meant to be voluntary, but the vast majority of refugees who registered in Pakistan never wanted to return to Afghanistan. They lack land to settle on and feared fighting between Taliban militants and NATO and Afghan government forces. Pakistan remained unwilling to budge on the issue though.

“The repatriations were meant to be voluntary, but the vast majority of refugees who registered in Pakistan never wanted to return to Afghanistan. They lack land to settle on and feared fighting between Taliban militants and

NATO and Afghan government forces”

Although UNHCR, Government of Pakistan and the world media has reported on the largest repatriation of refugees from 2002 onwards, there are few references to the coercion that energised the drive. The rough treatment meted out to Afghan refugees in this phase was epitomized in the repatriation but had manifestations all over the country.

For example, in 2002, the Rawalpindi and Islamabad Police launched a campaign against Afghan Refugees. The refugees were asked to produce a Passport with a valid Pakistani Visa. Few among the Afghan Refugees in Pakistan had a valid Pakistani Visa, therefore, almost every Afghan in Rawalpindi and Islamabad area was arrested. In the first four days of this crackdown some 2000 refugees were arrested in Rawalpindi. Another 470 Afghan Refugees were arrested by the Siala Police in a single day. The police also raided houses of Afghan refugees and also arrested a large number of Afghan refugee Children (under the age of 15 years) for not having valid documents although children were not required by law to possess or carry valid documents of any kind. Some 3000 to 4000 Afghan Refugees were detained at the Adiala Jail including some women and over 200 children.

This led even the UNHCR to criticize the Pakistani government's zeal in repatriating the Afghan refugees. “People are not commodities,” Kilian Kleinschmidt, then assistant representative in Pakistan for the UN refugee agency, said in a

*A young Afghan refugee girl near a refuse dump watching her playmates scavenge for food.
Photo: Khalid Hussain*



statement to the press in 2007. "The strategy based on the policy that all the Afghans should be repatriated by next year needs to be revised and reviewed."

ANOTHER RECORD

From 2001 to 2009, Afghanistan witnessed the largest refugee return in recorded history. Over 6 million refugees returned home that equaled to roughly one-half the current refugee population worldwide, wrote Daniel A. Kronenfeld of the US Department of State in a research paper. He looked at the basic incongruity between Afghanistan's record returns and its record poverty and pointed out that a number of observers have questioned the continued emphasis by the UNHCR and the international community on voluntary returns. His position being that neither can Afghanistan cope with returnees nor the can returnees cope in Afghanistan!

Daniel also noted several recent studies showing Afghan returnees were doing anything but staying put once they have returned to Afghanistan. Tens of thousands of Afghans daily cross back and forth into Pakistan and Iran in search of work, education, health care, and other needs. This migration is symptomatic of Afghanistan's inability to provide basic services for its population, many scholars believe.

POLITICS OF REPATRIATION

The politics of the issue of Afghan refugees has been between Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Iran, United States and Europe. UNHCR has represented the international community in Pakistan while the forum for the purpose has been the tripartite dialogue between Afghanistan, Pakistan and the International community obliged under international law to resolve the crisis. In October 2007, Afghanistan's parliament, "in an open letter", urged the government of Iran to halt deportation of Afghan refugees until the winter ends. Scores of other international processes have an interface with the issue as well. Following Pakistan's moves to repatriate more and more refugees in 2002, the Afghan High-Level Strategic Forum took place in Brussels on 17 March 2003. On the sidelines of that meeting UNHCR Commissioner Ruud Lubbers, Afghanistan's then Minister of Refugees and Repatriation Enayatullah Nazari and Minister for Water and Power and Frontier Regions (SAFRON) Aftab Ahmed Khan Sherpao signed a Tripartite Agreement aimed at facilitating the return of Afghan refugees. Under the accord, the UNHCR agreed to continue to assist the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees from Pakistan for three years starting in 2003. This has been subsequently extended twice, once up to December 2009 and a second time until the end of 2012. Subsequently, the Government of Pakistan announced that the Afghan repatriation strategy 2007-2009 would be reviewed beyond 2009. It was also decided that the revised strategy will be on a medium-term basis and linked with the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) for the period 2009-

2013.

However, the biggest hurdle in the voluntary repatriation of the Afghan refugees has been the non-conducive environment in Afghanistan, mainly due to conflict and the Government of Afghanistan's lack of infrastructural capacity and required level of focus on returnee issues. As decided in the Brussels conference, the Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS) is to be implemented up to 2013. This envisages a plan for reintegration of returnees inside Afghanistan for a durable solution to the problem. Another issue which has not kept the repatriation process at the desired pace is the security concerns of the international community.

"the situation inside Afghanistan will not allow all Afghans to return home in the near future"

In Pakistan, this process gave birth to a new strategy, called the Afghan Management and Repatriation Strategy, adding the word management to the Afghan issue in Pakistan for the first time. The preferred solution among the governments of Pakistan, Afghanistan and UNHCR, is still the voluntary repatriation of people back to their homeland in dignity and safety. At the same time all realize that the situation inside Afghanistan will not allow all Afghans to return home in the near future. So bureaucrats have come up with a strategy for the temporary management of Afghans inside Pakistan. It has been decided that Afghan's would be refugees no more in Pakistan after 2012!

Instead, the government of Pakistan says it wants to "move away from thinking of Afghans in Pakistan as purely a refugee issue to one which is viewed as a broad-based migration and economic issue". The argument is that not all Afghans in Pakistan are refugees as we also have Afghans who are here for reasons other than fear of persecution.

A NOVEL SOLUTION

According to details available to GSDM, the government of Pakistan has decided to introduce a flexible visa regime where Afghans will be given renewable visas for skilled and unskilled labour, for doing business in Pakistan, for educational purposes as well as for health and other reasons. This changes their status from 'refugees' to 'migrants' absolving the international community of its obligations to the suffering Afghan refugees leaving them in the known corrupt and incompetent hands of Pakistani bureaucrats to manage the population of Afghans inside Pakistan. This will also absolve the UNHCR of its responsibility towards the refugees as it would limit its scope as then the Afghan refugees would no longer fall under the mandate of UNHCR or considered refugees in Pakistan.

This policy has been in effect since 13 March 2009 when the Pakistani Government signed an agreement with the UNHCR allowing some 1.7 million Afghans to continue sheltering in their country until the end of 2012. The pact declares the stay of Afghan refugees as 'temporary' and looks forward to their gradual and voluntary repatriation, and international support for hosting one of the largest refugee communities in the world. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Representative Guenet Guebre-Christof and



Pakistan's Minister of State and Frontier Regions signed the Letter of Mutual Intent at a ceremony in Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan.

Under the agreement UNHCR has raised \$140 million from the international community to fund the Refugee Affected and Hosting Areas (RAHA) programme, which includes development projects aimed at boosting employment prospects, reviving agricultural and irrigation systems, repairing farm to market roads, improving crop and livestock production, and marketing produce. UNHCR also committed to raise funds for the Registration Information Project of Afghan Citizens (RIPAC) to improve the quality of registration data and to update and correct the Proof of Registration (PoR) cards so that information about the Afghan population remains current. Although the details of what will happen after that are still under discussion, the UNHCR says its goal is to find a final, durable solution to this human tragedy that began a quarter century ago. "The registration cards are a very important protection tool for Afghans in Pakistan, proving their legal right of stay in the country and providing protection against detention and deportation under the Foreigners Act. We very much appreciate the cooperation of the government in reissuing these cards to Afghan refugees," UNHCR's Country Representative Mengesha Kebede said to the local press recently.

REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

Refugees decide on their own if and when they want to return. Migrants have no such rights. In view of the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan, however, the immediate prospects of repatriation are not bright. With the US led occupation entering into its ninth year, Afghanistan is still caught in a vicious cycle: corrupt ruling elite eating whatever little resources available to the country, a reticent and religio-nationalist movement resisting the foreign forces aggressively, and an ambitious international community making an effort to bend the situation according to its own whims. Many refugees would surely continue to live in Pakistan.

“In view of the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan, however, the immediate prospects of repatriation are not bright. With the US led occupation entering into its ninth year, Afghanistan is still caught in a vicious cycle: corrupt ruling elite eating whatever little resources available to the country, a reticent and religio-nationalist movement resisting the foreign forces aggressively, and an ambitious international community making an effort to bend the situation according to its own whims”

Therefore, the international community should work closely with the Government of Pakistan to help resolve this humanitarian crisis instead of getting rid of the problem by changing official nomenclature for the Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

Decades of Struggle

An Afghan refugee's story of educating refugee children in Pakistan



Fatima Limar in her office at the Danish High School for Afghan Children.
Photo: Khalid Hussain/GSDM

Fatima and her husband Mohammad Masood Limar came to Pakistan in 1996 with their two children. She taught economics at a Government School in Kabul having done her Masters in Economics from the Kabul University in 1989. Her husband is a civil engineer and also had a government job when the family felt it was no longer safe for them to live in Kabul.

“It was hell when the Taliban took over Kabul”, tells Fatima Limar who runs a private school for Afghan children in Rawalpindi. Not only were there no more work but the family also feared reprisals for their liberal ideas when the Islamic extremists took over the reins of power in Afghanistan. “Pakistan was the only choice for a destination that we could make”, she says.

Both husband and wife started teaching in schools after reaching Islamabad. It took the two of them to seven years to save enough to start a school of their own for the children of Afghan refugees like themselves. Since 2003, the Roshan High School provides cheap education to refugee children and provides employment to some 20 other Afghan teachers.

However, she is anything but rich living in a rented house and owns no car. She charges very little as most students are rag pickers or daily laborers working at the fruit market in the morning before coming to school. She makes sure that her students not only get tuition but exposure as well. So she strives to make sure her students participate in all social activities for the Afghan refugees held in Islamabad including those by the UNHCR.

She is not happy with the assistance that UNHCR extends to the refugees here. “There is a lot of corruption especially in cases of immigration to rich countries”. She and her husband were rejected for immigration by the UNHCR despite being highly educated and diligent in preparing their applications.

“They do not even let ordinary Afghan refugees to cross their office gates. How will they help us?” she says.

Fatima and her family plans to stay in Pakistan as they see the situation in Afghanistan not safe for their return.

Trash, Addiction and Longing for a Better Future

A 15 year old Afghan refugee struggles to shape his future in Pakistan, but what he has got to do is trash-picking

Jamil vehemently denies addiction when asked if he was a junkie but his visage shows the intoxication nonetheless. And he is no exception in his social clique of rag pickers scavenging in the waste bins of Islamabad for valuable trash. Drug addiction is common and wild hashish plants plentiful in the environs of the Margalla hills surrounding Islamabad.

Born to an illiterate Afghan refugee, too old or too lazy to work, he took to rag picking at a very young age. He doesn't even remember how many years he has been in the business. His father came from the Lughman province in 1981 and settled on the outside Islamabad in a mud house. His older brother showed him to the ropes to help earn the keep for his family of seven siblings living in a mud house near Rawal Town on the outskirts of Islamabad.

He has no idea what Afghanistan is like and has never been to his homeland. Neither does he want to. His family has registered with the UNHCR but that is all they know for they have never received any assistance from the international agency so far.

The 15 year old boy earns up to Rs. 600 a day collecting empty plastic bottles, soda cans, plastic bags and odd metallic objects from trash. He is happy with his job and regularly brings his



finds to Malang Khan waste collection business. The day work is not heavy and he and his friends are normally done by noon and head back to their collection center for payment. A bath and socialization continues afterwards.

Their filthy work is symbolic of the deprivation that millions of Afghan refugees have endured for they could not go back to their homeland. Jamil Khan says he has heard Afghans born and grown in Pakistan are not happy in in their homeland if they go back. "They do not like living in Afghanistan," he said. "My own brother went but came back to Pakistan."

He doesn't resent his father or the job that he has to do, but resents the police. "Why do they bother us every day?" he asks adding, "every time they arrest me and my friends, we have to pay them thousands in bribes."

"Why do they bother us every day? Every time they arrest me and my friends, we have to pay them thousands in bribes"



There is nothing in Kabul for me



Amidst all odds, there are stories not only of struggle and despair, but also of survival and success

"There is nothing in Kabul for me", shrills Muhammad Nasir Samadi when GSDM asked if he wanted to go back to Afghanistan!

Nasir was born in Islamabad. His father Muhammad Sabir owned the first Afghan bakery in the capital in the commercial center of sector G-9 commonly known as Karachi Company. The locality was informally named "Little Afghanistan" because of a heavy concentration of refugees residing there.

His family has been very well off, thanks to the enterprising labor of his father and support of an educated extended family. Most of his relatives have migrated to the United States of America or England including his father. He himself holds an English citizenship since 2006 when he went there to study for his Bachelors in Business Education.

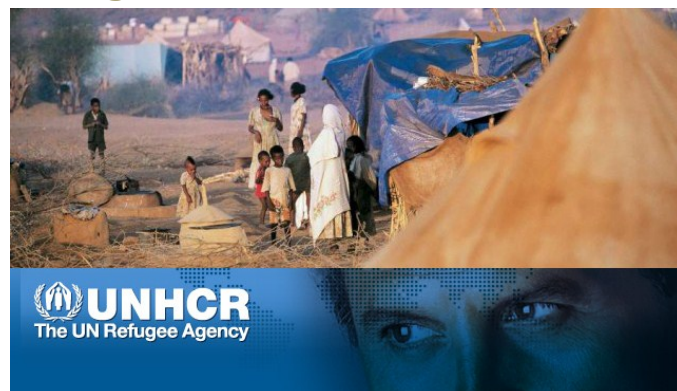
However, Nasir did not like living in England and came back to Pakistan in 2009. He now runs his family bakery employing many Afghan refugees and doing a roaring business. "Pakistan is the place to be for anyone who wants the best of all worlds", he says.

Interestingly, he also told GSDM of the high wages that are paid in today's Afghanistan thanks to the foreigners sustaining the economy there. "You get equal to Pakistani Rs. 1750 for a day's labor in Kabul", he says comparing the low rate of Rs. 300-400 a day paid for casual labor in Islamabad. "But then life is expensive there and the society is no longer fun to live in Kabul," he adds. The Little Afghanistan has now been reclaimed by Pakistanis as Nasir's family is the only prominent Afghan refugees living in the vicinity now. "Everybody has migrated to rich countries", he tells.

As to his own future, he wants to live in Pakistan where he was born, have friends and social standing!

(Given feature stories and preceding analysis was written by **Khalid Hussain**, GSDM's Regional Editor for South Asia. He can be reached at dvfilmpk@gmail.com)

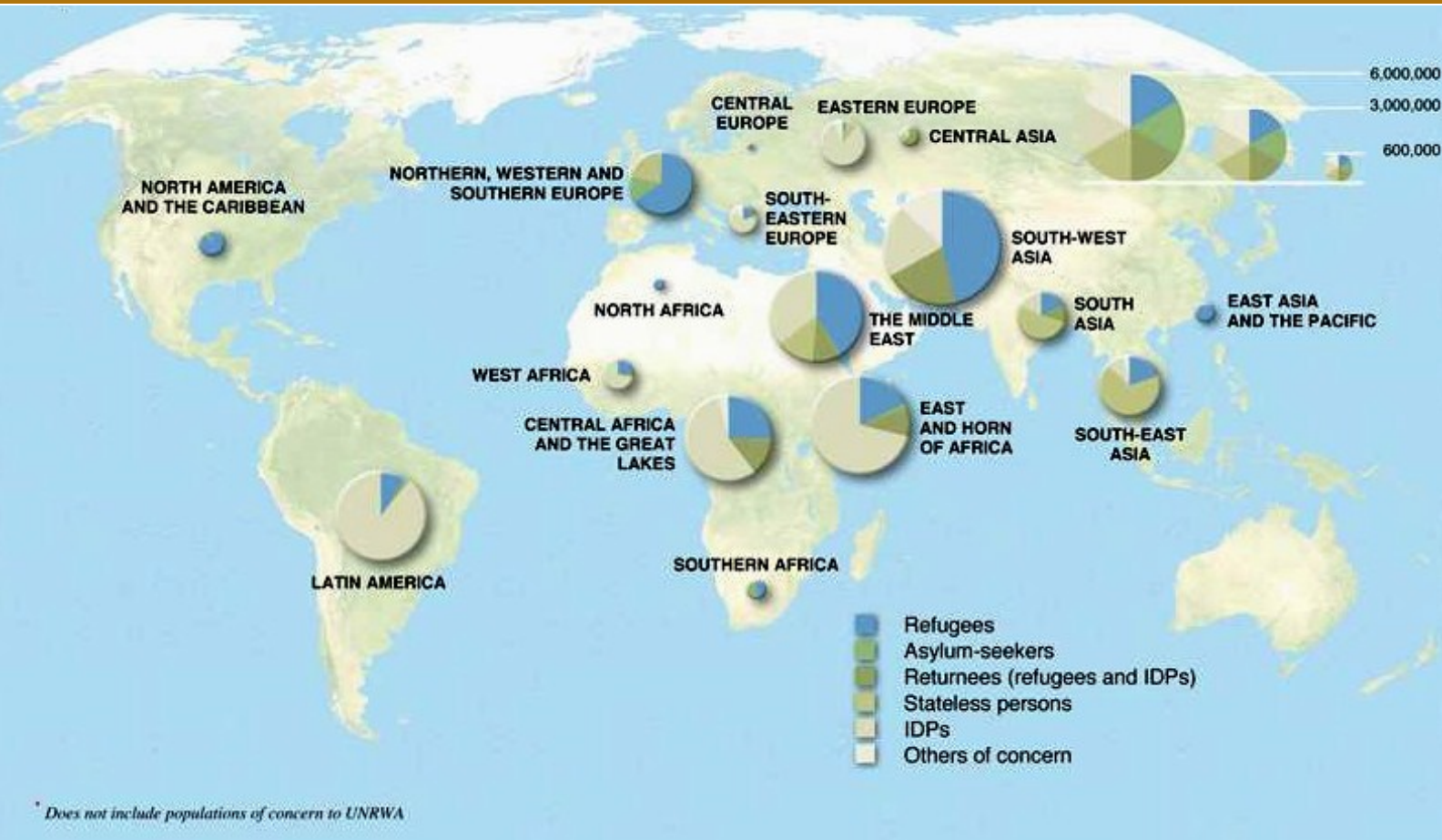
Refugees & the United Nations



In 1951, the United Nations Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Status of Refugees and Stateless Persons was held in Geneva. This conference led to the treaty called the "Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees of 28 July 1951." The international treaty establishes the definition of a refugee and their rights. A key element of the legal status of refugees is the principle of "non-refoulement" - a prohibition of the forcible return of people to a country where they have reason to fear prosecution. This protects refugees from being deported to a dangerous home country.

The United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR), is the United Nations agency established to monitor the world refugee situation. More information about refugees and their situation can be obtained from www.unhcr.org





UNHCR report finds 80 per cent of world's refugees in developing countries

A UNHCR report released recently reveals deep imbalance in international support for the world's forcibly displaced, with a full four-fifths of the world's refugees being hosted by developing countries – and at a time of rising anti-refugee sentiment in many industrialized ones.

GENEVA, June 2011 (UNHCR) – A UNHCR report released recently reveals deep imbalance in international support for the world's forcibly displaced, with a full four-fifths of the world's refugees being hosted by developing countries – and at a time of rising anti-refugee sentiment in many industrialized ones.

UNHCR's 2010 Global Trends report shows that many of the world's poorest countries are hosting huge refugee populations, both in absolute terms and in relation to the size of their economies. Pakistan, Iran and Syria

have the largest refugee populations at 1.9 million, 1.1 million and 1 million respectively.

Pakistan also has the biggest economic impact with 710 refugees for each US dollar of its per capita GDP (Gross Domestic Product), followed by Democratic Republic of the Congo and Kenya with 475 and 247 refugees respectively. By comparison, Germany, the industrialized country with the largest refugee population (594,000 people), has 17 refugees for each dollar of per capita GDP.

Overall, the picture presented by the 2010 report is of a drastically changed protection environment to that of 60 years ago when the UN refugee agency was founded. At that time UNHCR's caseload was 2.1 million Europeans, uprooted by World War Two. Today, UNHCR's work extends to more than 120 countries and encompasses people forced to flee across borders as well as those in flight within their own countries.

The 2010 Global Trends report shows that 43.7 million people are now displaced worldwide – roughly equalling the entire populations of Colombia or South Korea, or of Scandinavia and Sri Lanka combined. Within this total are 15.4 million refugees (10.55 million under UNHCR's care and 4.82 million registered with the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees), 27.5 million people displaced within their own country by conflict, and nearly 850,000 asylum-seekers, nearly one fifth of them in South Africa alone.

Particularly distressing are the 15,500 asylum applications by unaccompanied or separated children, most of them Somali or

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Afghan. The report does not cover displacement seen during 2011, including from Libya, Côte d'Ivoire and Syria. "In today's world there are worrying misperceptions about refugee movements and the international protection paradigm," said António Guterres, UN High Commissioner for Refugees. "Fears about supposed floods of refugees in industrialized countries are being vastly overblown or mistakenly conflated with issues of migration. Meanwhile, it's poorer countries that are left having to pick up the burden." Reflecting the prolonged nature of several of today's major international conflicts, the report finds that the refugee experience is becoming increasingly drawn-out for millions of people worldwide. UNHCR defines a protracted refugee situation as one in which a large number of people are stuck in exile for five years or longer.

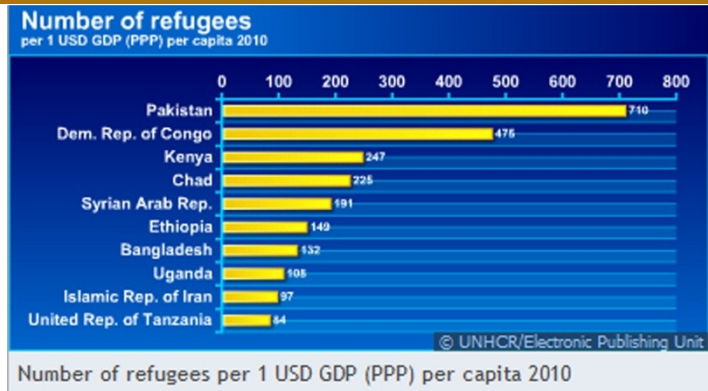
In 2010, and of the refugees under UNHCR's mandate, 7.2 million people were in such a situation – more than at any time since 2001. Meanwhile only 197,600 people were able to return home, the lowest number since 1990. Some refugees have been in exile for more than 30 years. Afghans, who first fled the Soviet invasion in 1979, accounted for a third of the world's refugees in both 2001 and in 2010. Iraqis, Somalis, Congolese (Democratic Republic of the Congo) and Sudanese were also among the top 10 nationalities of refugees at both the start and end of the decade.

"One refugee without hope is too many," said High Commissioner Guterres. "The world is failing these people, leaving them to wait out the instability back home and put their lives on hold indefinitely. Developing countries cannot continue to bear this burden alone and the industrialized world must address this imbalance. We need to see increased resettlement quotas. We need accelerated peace initiatives in long-standing conflicts so that refugees can go home."

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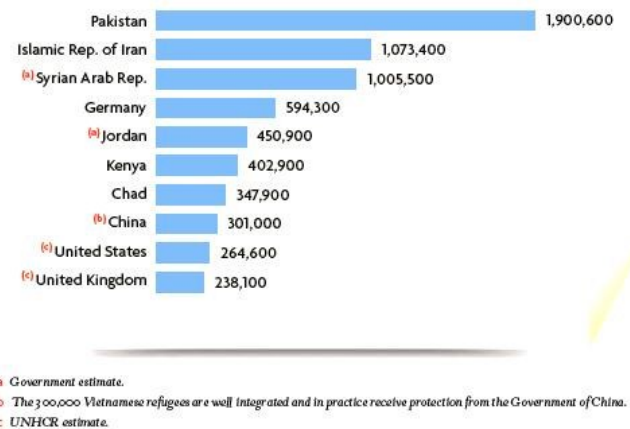
António Guterres, UN High Commissioner for Refugees

Despite the low level of refugee returns last year, the situation for people displaced within their own countries – so-called internally displaced people, or IDPs – showed some movement. In 2010, more than 2.9 million IDPs returned home in countries including Pakistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda and Kyrgyzstan. Nonetheless even with these return



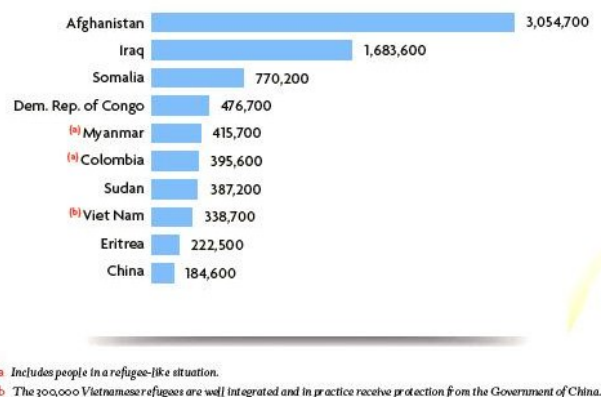
levels, at 27.5 million people the global number of internally displaced was the highest in a decade.

Fig. Major refugee hosting countries | end-2010



A further but harder-to-quantify group that UNHCR cares for is stateless people, or people lacking the basic safety net of a nationality. The number of countries reporting stateless populations has increased steadily since 2004, but differences in definitions and methodologies still prevent reliable measurement of the problem.

Fig. Major source countries of refugees | end-2010



In 2010, the reported number of stateless people (3.5 million) was nearly half of that in 2009, but mainly due to methodological changes in some countries that supply data. Unofficial estimates put the global number closer to 12 million. UNHCR will be launching a worldwide campaign in August this year to bring better attention to the plight of the world's stateless and to accelerate action to help them.

Struggling to Integrate

An integration story of Bhutanese Refugees in the USA

BANDANA RANA

Text & Photos

Bhutanese refugees began arriving in the United States on March 25, 2008, the first wave of what the United Nations describes as one of the world's largest resettlement efforts. The US offered to resettle 60,000 of the estimated 1,07,000 Bhutanese Refugees of Nepalese Origin. People of the Nepalese Origin lived in Bhutan for more than a century until the 1990's when Bhutan introduced strict citizenship laws excluding ethnic Nepalese. Tens of thousands of ethnic Nepalese who were essentially Bhutanese were forcibly removed while others fled to avoid arrest. The last round of talks between the government of Nepal and Bhutan failed when the Bhutanese government refused to recognize the refugees as citizens. There are many facts to the life of a refugee, from migration, to economic challenges, cultural differences and the process of finally obtaining citizenship. In each refugee's mind, there exists a different picture of what they believe will be their new life in the United States, or other foreign country. For some it may be holding their child's hand as they walk to school, for others it may be the promise of a good paying job, and yet others may envision something as simple as a life free of the struggle in their former country.

I was up and ready to meet Katie White, outreach co-coordinator of The International Institute of Erie PA. The International Institute is a non-profit organization that helps refugees coming from all over the world. Upon arrival at the International Institute, Katie welcomed me, and introduced me to her staff. It was amazing to meet such a dedicated workforce. With the warm welcome Katie and I started our interview. Katie has been dedicated to helping refugees for a number of years. She understands thoroughly the struggle of moving to a strange country, and adapting to a new culture. It is rare indeed to find someone who has dedicated their life to help others who have been in struggle, to finally find a place where they are welcomed. In speaking with Katie regarding the struggles and limitations refugees face, it became quite apparent that many of those that relocate into the country are very overwhelmed and unprepared for finding a place as a citizen of the United States. Katie states that "basic English skills, poor education, and even harassment by criminal elements in the temporary residences that refugees occupy are very big hurdles. In light of this problem, Katie and International Institute offers a full host of support for the refugee population. This support includes classes such as English as a second language (ESL), civics and citizenship, General Equivalency Degree (GED), application for naturalization, and safety training. In addition to educational classes the International Institute coordinates food, housing, medical support, and creativity classes. I was very surprised at the amount of dedication and support the Institute provides. At this point, I was very excited to meet a Bhutanese/Nepalese refugee family. With Katie's help I was quickly on my way too meet these wonderful people.



"We feel fortunate for having a house, education for our children, and citizenship" says 47 year old Tanka Maya Acharya, a former Bhutanese refugee. Tanka stayed in Nepal for 19 years with her husband and five children, as a Bhutanese refugee. Tanka fled Bhutan when the Bhutanese government refused to recognize them as a citizen, and was sent back to Nepal with her family. Her husband Shiva was imprisoned for 3 months in Bhutan just for being an ethnic Nepali. People of the Nepalese origin lived in Bhutan for more than a century until the 1990's when Bhutan introduced strict citizenship laws excluding ethnic Nepalese. Tens of thousands of ethnic Nepalese who were essentially Bhutanese were forcibly removed while others fled to avoid arrest. The last round of talks between the government of Nepal and Bhutan failed when the Bhutanese government refused to recognize the refugees as citizens. Tanka recalls those days with a long sigh and states "moving from one place to another in search of identity was very painful for my family. As a mother it was difficult for me to let my children understand we were refugees."

"moving from one place to another in search of identity was very painful for my family. As a mother it was difficult for me to let my children understand we were refugees"

The 11th of January 2011 was a very important day for Tanka and her family; it was the day they arrived in the USA. "It was a long journey but to see the big buildings, western people and many new things was just like a dream" says Tanka with a big



Mrs Tanka with her children

smile. She tells me of her journey offering me a warm cup of tea; with the first sip we continued our conversation. The first city they arrived in was Erie, small yet very welcoming city in the state of Pennsylvania. She had heard about New York City but not about Erie. She didn't hesitate to mention how scared and confused she was. Moving worried Tanka and her family, but they were excited in the understanding that it was also a part of process. "We were very happy to come to Erie but unprepared for the famous lake effect snow." "We like it over here somehow it makes us feel that we are in Nepal" says son Jaga Acharya. Jaga looked exceptionally proud to have his family beneath one roof. Jaga gave me a slight hint that he was practicing his English language as he was trying to use as many English words as possible in our conversation. While cleaning his eyeglasses, he thoughtfully told me of his ambition of becoming an engineer. Before I could ask anything, he proudly mentioned that he holds a regular job and earns money to support his family. They were calm, humble and a very polite family; I would have never been able to envision them in their terrible situation in the recent past by their gestures of gratitude.

Tanka took another sip of tea and said "We could not study, but we want our children to have an education in order to achieve a bright and secured future. Nothing makes us more proud than to see our children attend school every day" I could sense her pride when she shared tales of her family. On the answer to my question regarding the problems they are facing in the USA, the emphasis was on the huge cultural differences and language. "It is very difficult to learn the English language at this age however I attend a regular ESL class at International Institute with my husband" says Tanka bursting into laughs. It seemed all her children could easily understand and speak English. I assured Tanka, that with practice, very soon she would be able to understand and speak the language. She smiled and nodded in agreement. On that note I was ready to wrap up my meeting with the Acharya family. We exchanged our good byes and I was on my way home.

"We could not study, but we want our children to have an education in order to achieve a bright and secured future. Nothing makes us more proud than to see our children attend school every day"

Thoughts were running through my mind on the drive home. Thoughts of Tanka wearing traditional Nepalese dress, Shiva in the Nepali Dhaka topi (traditional hat), amazed me how they still carry the Nepalese culture. It made me proud to see the determination of the Acharya family to move ahead for a better future. There is no easy solution to being refugee and relocating to a new country. It is rare to find an organization like the International Institute too. With the help of the US government to provide extensive assistance for refugees, a much easier transition awaits those left out in the cold by their home governments. It is wonderful that this assistance is available; however, the best solution always lies in helping one another.

(For more information on The International Institute of Erie please visit www.refugees.org, Bandana is a freelance contributor to Global South Development Magazine and can be reached at bandanagleason@gmail.com)

Bhutanese Refugees: Facts and Figures



Refugee Population - Approximately 108,000 • 95% are Lhotshampa or Southern Bhutanese • Location – Seven Camps in Eastern Nepal • Arrival in Nepal – Early 1990's (most by 1995) • Status in Nepal – Prima facie refugees under UNHCR mandate

History leading to flight and need for resettlement v 1980's – Bhutan adopts Bhutanization policies –limiting language, customs, religion, and political parties. v 1988 - Census conducted to identify "genuine Bhutanese." Many of Nepalese descent excluded. v 1988- 1990 Demonstrations and protests in Southern Bhutan against new policies. Leaders jailed. First refugees flee to India. v October 1990 - Bhutanese army fires upon demonstrations killing & wounding many. v 1990-92 - Government closes schools, removes officials, and begins confiscating land. Government forces many to sign "Voluntary Migration Forms" before expulsion. v 1993- 95 - Refugee population at grows from first group of 40,000 to 80,000 as others flee and join relatives in Nepal. v June 2003 – Nepal/Bhutan discussions on repatriation stall after pilot Bhutanese verification process finds only 2% of refugees are Bhutanese.

Demographics: Gender Male Female Male – 50.7% Female – 49.3%

Age Distribution 0-17 years old = 35.5% (under 5 years old = 7.6) 18-59 years old = 56.9 60 and older = 6.6 >18 18-59 60>

Religion and Ethnicity v Hindu – largest group (60-70%) v Buddhists – (20-25%) v Kirat (indigenous) - (5-8%) v Christians – (2-3%) v Over 50 ethnic and caste groups in the camps (e.g. Brahman, Dahlits, Daming.) v Populations settled in camps along ethnic/ caste lines which play an important role in social and camp dynamics

Language and Education v 99% of the population speak Nepali v 35% of the population speak some English v 40% of the population are students v Education is to grade 10 in the camps (Nepali curriculum) v Some students attend Nepali schools beyond primary v A few have attended university level in India v 25-30% have no education Efforts towards universal access to primary education have helped to reduce differences among groups in education.

“We can meet bad people but we cannot meet a bad nation”

To have a multicultural society, I say it is not just the appetency for dolma or kebab; we must give people the possibility to be a part of this life

Yousif Abu Al Fawz is a familiar name among immigrant activists in Finland. Yousif himself a political refugee, left his native Iraq in 1979. Since then he has actively involved himself in various social issues that mostly deal with refugees, immigrants and their rights and wellbeing. Yousif has authored many books, is a freelance journalist and a documentary maker as well. Global South Development Magazine's Assistant Editor Lawin Khalil Mustafa recently met with him and talked about various issues that range from multiculturalism to rise of extreme right-wing political parties in the West. An excerpt:

Could you please tell something about yourself?

My name is Yousif Abu Al Fawz and I'm from Samawa, Iraq. As for my background, I was born in 1956, and I come from a liberal family. I left Iraq in 1979 due to political reasons; I was active in left-wing youth organizations.

Since my departure, I have been travelling much in different countries before coming to Finland in 1995. Since then, I have been living in Kerava. Sometimes the Finnish press has described me as “Keravalainen Irakista” because of my affiliation with the city. I have managed to do much work, for example, working in multicultural groups that includes refugees, other immigrants and locals.

One of the anti-discrimination projects that I initiated with great success is concerned with promoting intercultural communication between foreigners and children and the youth in schools and other institutes. I also do voluntary work, for example, by providing basic services and support to refugees or consultancy to Kerava municipality. This has become a part of my life.

Apart from that, I am also a writer and freelance journalist. I have published ten books in Arabic and one of them is called Taikalintu; a book translated into Finnish which shares the stories and issues of refugees migrating into Europe and Finland. In addition, I have written and directed two documentary films for Yleisradio. Currently, I am working in a project which deals with the topic of Muslims in Finland.



How do you see the current situation of refugees in Finland?

Finland is one of the European countries that have agreed to the Geneva statements and they must answer to that.

Refugees' state is affected by the political and economic questions. For instance, it was reported about a year ago that Iraq is one of the countries which Finland has considered, with the exception of some areas, to be a safe country. This meant that refugees were accepted from the defined areas only. This decision from the Finnish government was based on incorrect information. Iraq is still under invasion of the United States. They tried to build democracy but there is still room for development. Sectarian violence is still a turbulent issue and this does not make Iraq a safe country. But in the past two years, there has been a group of refugees from Iraq seeking asylum and Finland accepted them. However, in general, we can say that Finland gives asylum to many refugees.

Recently, we have witnessed the success of the Populist Party Perussuomalaiset (True Finns) in the parliamentary elections held in Finland. How do you think their success will affect on the situation of refugees or immigrants?

First of all, the economic crisis or depression witnessed in international level has influenced the crisis in Finland also. Perussuomalaiset (True Finns) is one of the results of the economical and political crisis in Finland. The people in the time of election; Finnish and foreign people, were worried about it.

But this week, we witnessed establishment of a six-party government where the Perussuomalaiset went into opposition. Now it is clear that there is no immediate threat from this party. They cannot be decisively active because of their 20 percent share of seats in the parliament. They cannot decide some important decisions due to alliance of the six parties that have formed the government. They have the power to prevent decisions that do not act in vested interest of Finnish society. This is a democratic country; there is the constitution; there is a system, and Perussuomalaiset cannot break that. In the future presidential elections, maybe they will have minor success but they will not succeed in winning presidency. Therefore, there is no real threat but some trouble will come along as they are one of the heading parties in the parliament.

However, a quotation from one of my books state: *"The dream is like the wing of a butterfly but the reality is like the feet of an elephant."* It is so heavy! And the reality is the current economic situation and workforce demand of Europe requires immigrants who may come from, for example, the Middle East, Latin America or India. They cannot stop these needs. They need immigrants or refugees to meet this demand. If the Perussuomalaiset succeed to deport all foreigners, then life will stop in Finland because they are working everywhere. They serve this country; they serve this society, so they are important for life. We cannot take in negative examples and stereotypes to provide an accurate picture of foreigners or refugees. There are many positive individuals engaged in constructive activities trying to build and make a new life; and in the process, contribute to the country's development and welfare. In my opinion, Perussuomalaiset cannot stop continuance of life i.e. their influence on the situation of

immigration or refugees receiving asylum will be minimal or nonexistent.

How do you see the recent uprisings in the Arab world and have they affected the current situation of refugees in Finland?

It is good news that this dream is becoming a reality because people have suffered for a long time under dictatorship and old ruling systems. The uprising has received much support from the international community and Arabic community living outside the conflict-affected countries.

The uprising's impact on the lives of people is evident. Till now, the people in the 'hot points' have majorly scattered to the neighbouring countries, for example, Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and Tunisia. But the number of asylum seekers in Europe is not significant. According to my information, there have been no cases received in Finland yet.

In my view, Finland and European nations must be ready to provide support and asylum to the victims and refugees of the uprising. Moreover, this uprising should be supported in order to have real change, achieve democracy and a functioning state which in effect may lower the rate of refugees and displaced people. We must try to find solutions to the problems in the target areas. If it be real democracy and good social life, then why would people be obliged to leave their countries? In my opinion, more leverage in the political and social level is required from European nations in order to support the people to realize the social change they aspire.



“The dream is like the wing of a butterfly but the reality is like the feet of an elephant”

“The unemployed foreigner can form social and cultural enclaves that are limited to their origins”

In your opinion, what are the challenges and opportunities to integration of refugees or immigrants in Finland?

This question is one of the problems facing the foreigners living in Finland. In my view, it is not enough for foreigners to learn the Finnish language. They must have opportunities to learn about Finnish history and culture and have access to jobs where they can apply the skills that they have learnt, build on their livelihood, and cross the line to become a member of the society.

To have a multicultural society, I say it is not just the appetency for dolma or kebab; we must give people the possibility to be a part of this life. A high percentage of people are unemployed. Most of the people do not use Finnish language because they may go to school but return home to forget the day's lesson. Culture is also a factor. The unemployed foreigner can form social and cultural enclaves that are limited to their origins i.e. an Indian's life can be a small India inside Finland or a Turk's life can be a small Turkey inside Finland.

Language is like sports; it needs practice. Therefore, we must not open windows only but doors also. Then it can be said that we have succeeded in our efforts to integrate immigrants and refugees. However, an immigrant or refugee's motivation to participate and take an active role in integrating themselves to society and seeking opportunities for a better life is also crucial.

Do you think refugees or immigrants face injustices in Finland?

Generally, I do not think so but there may be a few cases. People in Finland live under the principle of equality, and I have been living for about 16 years here but have not faced injustice though am an active citizen in Iraqi and Finnish society.

Sometimes among foreigners, I have heated discussions about Finland not being a racist country. If there is the uprising of the Perussuomalaiset, one must still take into account that the party is politically motivated; it is not a social movement. One of the causes to their success has been influenced by other supporters' frustration with their own party, which in effect, motivated people to vote for the Perussuomalaiset. I tend to say “We can meet bad people but we cannot meet a bad nation.” This is everywhere.

Do you think repatriation of refugees is a viable option in the long run? And if not, what are the hindering factors?

The question to return home is a difficult one to many people living in exile. In my opinion, Finnish people know the answer better than us because in their history, they have faced the

issues of refugees and repatriation. During World War II, many Finnish people sought refuge in different countries such as Sweden or the United States.

But when Finland became a peaceful and prosperous country, many refugees did not return home. This is because they had experienced a change inside them and the country had changed also i.e. various changes had occurred that resulted in them finding another life; another route.

If we speak of families that have come from Iraq, we can say that their children may find difficulty in returning to the country of their origin. This is because they may have lost touch to their roots and found a new identity through their exposure to life and culture in Finland.

As in my case, I am different now. I am proud to be from Iraq and I try to help Iraqi people. My work involves Iraqi culture but I belong to this country too. This is my second country! In my previous work that dealt with the life of Iraqi people (Kurdish and Arabic) in Finland, some people described it as the Finnish Kurdish/Arab.

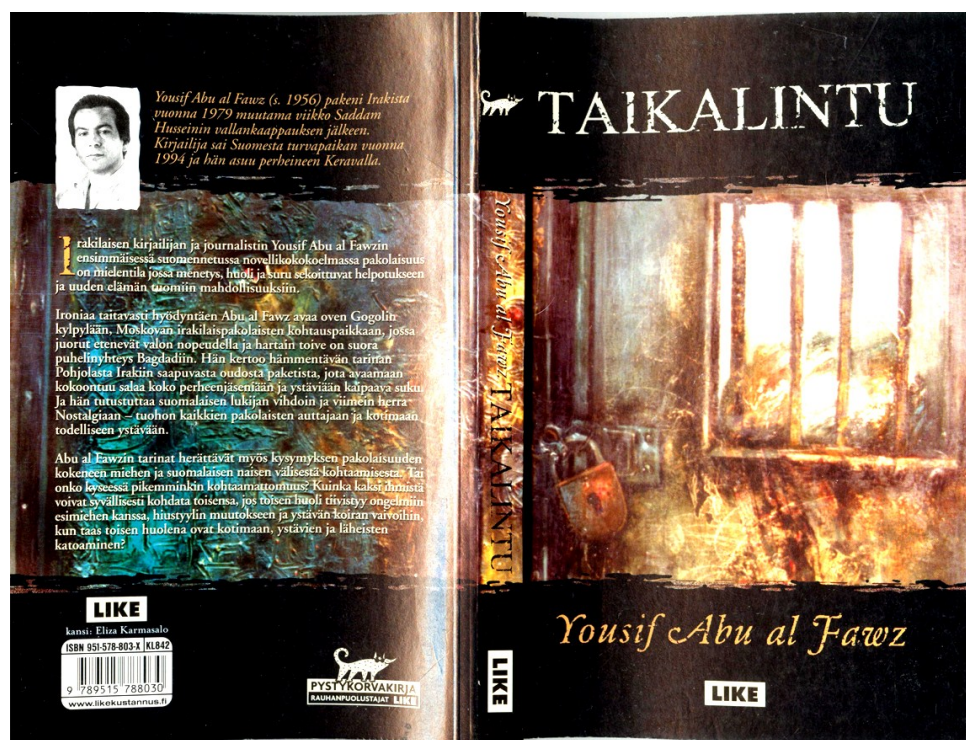
As for returning, it is not a question of packing your bags and leaving. It is not so easy because you must start life from the scratch again. Moreover, in Iraq's case, safety is still a critical issue and though dictatorship has ended, there are various social problems hindering the possibility to repatriate refugees.

What do you think about the work of different INGOs and international agencies working for refugees, for example, UNHCR?

I think they are doing their job well. I came myself through their help in 1995. Many refugees seek asylum successfully through their platforms.

In addition, I have been receiving quality information about the situation of refugees from such agencies, for example, in contradiction to the conventional view, the largest numbers of refugees are not in developed countries such as in European ones. Instead, they are mostly found to be in third world countries and they suffer from this situation.

The issues of refugees are often politically influenced and challenging but we hope that these organizations are succeeding in working to provide them a chance to a better life.



Land ownership crisis to women in Tanzania

With some light at the end of the tunnel

MARY NAMUSOKE

Rungwe is one of the seven districts that make up Mbeya region in south Western Tanzania. The main activity here is agriculture and small scale businesses. Land is used moderately with agriculture with the growing of maize, rice and beans for food; and also tea, coffee and cocoa for cash.

Just like many of the African societies, the women in Rungwe District have been faced with the challenge of property ownership and inheritance especially as regards to land. This is pointed out to be one of the prevalent problems silently affecting the social wellbeing of women in this area, yet, many of them (women) do not come in open to reveal it simply because they feel it would be going against their customary laws.

Ms Mary Mgaya, a resident advocate and lawyer working with National Organization for Legal Support (NOLA) Mbeya branch in Tanzania revealed in an interview with GSDM that a number of cases of women from Rungwe seeking legal support on matters related to land ownership have been on an increase for a time now. She says that widows are often chased away unless they accept to be inherited to one of the late husband's brothers; otherwise they are not allowed to stay on the land once the husband dies.

Ms Mary pointed out that according to a research conducted by NOLA, the challenge stems from the fact that, the civil laws in Tanzania have not repealed customary ones. Whereas the legislations governing land management and overall ownership (Land Act No 4 and the Village land act no 5 of 1999) grant equal opportunity for all to access, use and own land regardless of sex, race and religion, the customary laws among the Banyakyusa (the biggest tribe, about 95% in Rungwe district) practically denies a woman the right to own and inherit land although she can use it through her father and or her husband.

According to research findings by the National Organization for Legal

Support Tanzania, 2008 it is only in rare circumstances when a woman is allowed to inherit clan land for cultivation purposes when there are no male relatives in the respective clan who could inherit it. But even in such circumstances, women are not allowed to dispose it off or mortgage it for security of tenure purposes as it is feared that a woman once allowed to own land by virtue of inheriting her deceased husband's estate, she may get remarried to another man from elsewhere who may settle on the clan land and assert his superiority as a head of the family.

This exclusionist part of customary law has been criticized as repugnant by the provisions of Article 13 of the Constitution of Tanzania of 1977. Defiled the constitutional provision that every citizen has the right to own and use property without discrimination.

Mr. Dibson Mwakabungu, a middle aged man from the Banyakyusa asserted that the enforcement of various legislations is hindered due to the fact that many women do not know their rights as far as land ownership is concerned. He explained that since mid 1980s the laws governing property ownership directed that all Tanzanians were entitled to access, own and use property without discrimination. It was however in 1999 when land ownership was clearly pointed out that women were equally entitled to own land.

Mwakabungu further points that the two main laws governing land in Tanzania give right to a woman to own land through acquiring it, buying or by inheriting it from parents or husband. However he pins the continuation of the denial of women to own land to lacking awareness and general knowledge and as a result they continue to suffer at the expense of the customary law. According to legal frameworks in Tanzania the civil law takes precedence in case the two legal systems conflict.

In the same regard, Ms. Dora Mwang'ombola an entrepreneur in Mbeya region originating from Rungwe district asserts that, the appalling situation would be redressed if the majority women especially in rural parts being deprived of their rights to own property were to be sensitized of their citizenry rights including the right to access, use and own property. Giving her own example, Ms Dora, who at the same time is a widow, said that unlike in the past where she could have been disturbed after the husband's death in regards to property inheritance and ownership, she found no

problems mainly because everything was well laid down in a will. So in such a case, the husband's relative could not interfere.

Ms. Dora, a mother of three children in her early thirties says, "I have not been disturbed much following the death of husband. We had everything stipulated in the memorandum and articles of association to our company (Mbeya Golden City Hotels Ltd) where I was the Director. Moreover, we had written a will just in case one of us departed should not be disturbed." She further points out that if all the men and women in rural parts in Rungwe and all districts of Tanzania would be educated in will writing it will put to the end of the oppression and exploitation that women have been suffering over the years.

She is optimistic that with increasing education and awareness levels, the trend is greatly changing that women in this area can buy and own land. "But women need to be encouraged through this. Changing the mindset can be difficult, but they can make it," Ms. Dora points out adding that she herself has bought land at Mbambo village in Rungwe district without any challenge neither from her husband's nor her own relatives. The government together with other stakeholders should put more efforts in popularizing the land Acts so as to encourage women tap the opportunities therein. More so, efforts to mobilize and sensitize people in will making and also change people's negative attitudes towards women and their capabilities can hasten the move towards equal opportunities to all.

(Mary is GSDM's Special Correspondent for Women's Issues in Africa and can be reached at namusokmaria@yahoo.co.uk)

"it is feared that a woman once allowed to own land by virtue of inheriting her deceased husband's estate, she may get remarried to another man from elsewhere who may settle on the clan land and assert his superiority as a head of the family"



Ms. Dora speaking to Mary Namusoke, GSDM's Special Correspondent for Women's Issues in Africa. Photo by Lingson Adam

Brazil: An Upcoming World Power

From Aid Recipient to Donor

Many would not expect much prosperity of 26 years of democracy, but in Brazil's case it has encouraged them to become a leading developing country and an upcoming world power

MARITA HAUG

It might come as a surprise to some that Brazil functions both as an aid recipient and an aid donor. Brazil has in recent years developed rapidly, which has changed its position in the global community. The differences in the country are still vast, but compared to just twenty years ago the improvements are huge, certainly due to the new democratic government established in 1985. Many would not expect much prosperity of 26 years of democracy, but in Brazil's case it has encouraged them to become a leading developing country and an upcoming world power.

Brazil currently has the seventh biggest economy in the world. In 2010, Brazil achieved an economic growth of 7.5% (*Office of the President and Embassy of Brazil in London*). Besides being the biggest country in Latin America- both by geographical measures and by a population of 190 million, it also has a lot of natural resources, which makes it an important agricultural nation. On one hand, Brazil receives international aid and implements programs to benefit its own development, but on the other hand, it also helps other countries to prosper by being a donor of aid. The country is currently both a recipient and a provider of aid, which brings many lingering questions regarding why and how they are able to do so. How come Brazil is an exclusive donor to many developing countries? What are some of their challenges in general and as a donor?

Once, aid flowed in one direction, as the developing world received aid from the richest industrialized nations. The traditional "North to South" aid stream is now a lot more complex. Countries like China, Brazil and India are both recipients and donors of aid. The definitions of developed and developing countries are losing their relevance and are in the need of an update. According to the UN 9.8% (UN, 2008) of the total aid flows are coming from these countries also named as emerging donors. It is important to underline that Brazil has been active in *South-South Cooperation (SSC)* for 40 years. SSC was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1978 to promote, support, and coordinate a trilateral cooperation between developing countries and developed countries. Over the past few years the aid has increased significantly, and Brazil is now more important in the international aid community.

Even though Brazil's aid contributions are increasing, the differences and the inequality on a national basis are still big challenges.

According to the *CIA's World Factbook*, the lowest 10% by household income consumes 1.1% of the nation's consumption while the highest 10% by household income consumes 43%.

Corruption is a well-known phenomenon, and the cultural differences make it hard to find the best solutions. What works for one community may not work for another simply because of the different lifestyles and cultural diversity within national boundaries. However, a report released in 2010 of the United Nations shows that more than 30% of the population was living in slums in 2000 compared to 26% in 2010, which is a noteworthy improvement.



On one side Brazil therefore contributes with great ideas and projects for other struggling countries to follow merely by being a role model. Among different successful projects provided of the Brazilian government are the HIV/AIDS programs and *Bolsa Familia*. In 2003, 31 developing countries had adopted Brazil's guidelines for treatment and prevention (*Chicago Tribune, 2003*). Brazil also got the opportunity the same year to visit Geneva to help formulate policies to fight AIDS around the world, which means the Brazilians are being perceived as a resource for improvement.

The Economist has not been shy about its description of *Bolsa Familia* which termed the scheme as an "anti-poverty scheme invented in Latin America", and "winning converts worldwide". About 12 million Brazilian families receive funds from the program, which means that the children of the families are attending school and are vaccinated (*BBC, 2010*). These two criteria need to be fulfilled to receive contributions. The federal center and the municipalities have shown a unique way of collaborating, which are some of the reasons why *Bolsa Familia* is an effective welfare policy for the poor. *The World Bank* and *UNDP* have done a lot of research on *Bolsa Familia*, and they commend the positive impacts of the program.

On the other side Brazil also grants direct aid to countries like Haiti, Mali, Mozambique, Timor-Leste, Guinea Bissau, Paraguay, Guatemala and Angola, clearly focusing on countries in Africa and Latin America. Brazil focuses on social programs and agriculture to encourage internal development, which also makes Brazil a popular donor for these recipients.

"Once, aid flowed in one direction, as the developing world received aid from the richest industrialized nations. The traditional "North to South" aid stream is now a lot more complex. Countries like China, Brazil and India are both recipients and donors of aid"

According to *Overseas Development Institute (ODI)* there are five main reasons why Brazilian development cooperation is particularly appealing to developing countries.

“even though it has its own issues, Brazil could function as a model for other developing countries, learning from their mistakes as well as their progress, and growing by example”

Above all, Brazil has a lot of policy experiences when it comes to development. Second, the technology and expertise Brazil can offer is a good match for the climatic conditions and for the level of economic and institutional development. Third, Brazil does not have a dominant colonial past, which makes it more politically neutral. It is also considered stable, democratic, and at peace with its neighbors. Fourth, the aid is not conditional. Fifth and finally,

Brazil is both a recipient and a donor, which in many ways gives a better understanding of the needs and challenges facing the developing world.

However, Brazil is not the exclusive on all these points. Combined these five factors above give Brazil some comparative advantages. Ireland and Scandinavian countries do not have a colonial past either, and China and India are also examples of countries, which are both donors and recipients (*Brazil: an emerging aid player, 2010*).

Brazil is therefore an important resource in the world community when it comes to methods and ideas for progressive development. What could be Brazil's reasons for being a contributor to this international cooperation? The main reason why Brazil as of late has increased its foreign policy will depend on whom you ask, but there are several notable factors. First, Brazil has the opportunity to actually offer good, sustainable aid programs and knowledge because they have great experience from their own development. To share this knowledge, aid is therefore an action to strengthen solidarity. In a 2011 article Rubens Barbosa of the *Federation of Industries of the State of São Paulo* said there are other important reasons as well. He mentioned the “drive for prestige” and Brazil's aspiration to become a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council. (*O Estado de São Paulo, 2011*). This would make Brazil even more powerful in international relations, but it is not Brazil's main focus in foreign policy. Matters of economy and trade make commercial sense to expand their business overseas, for example by gaining access to the Chinese market. Another perspective is that the recipient of aid or technology later favors purchases from Brazil.

As one of the new big donors Brazil also faces policy challenges. According to ODI (*Brazil: an emerging aid player, 2010*) Brazil has yet to prove the quality of its development cooperation program. A common problem among emerging donors is the lack of reliable and accurate data on aid volumes and the impact of this. A good evaluation of the different programs is therefore a challenge.



Brazil also has some more steps to go when it comes to providing effective coordination between the different institutions in order to make the foreign policy work. There are a lot of different institutions involved, but Brazilian Agency for Cooperation (ABC, a department of the *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*) finds it hard to make the cooperation successful. The reason is that ABC is vulnerable because the department does not have financial or human resource management autonomy. At the same time they are supposed to provide the collaboration between the different institutions, but to what extent the programs work might get lost in poor documentation and evaluation (ODI, *Brazil: an emerging aid player, 2010*). This problem is not exclusive to Brazil as many other SSC countries struggle with the same issues.

The experiences from the traditional donors can help Brazil to better improve the quality of the programs - a trilateral cooperation. Brazil is not likely reproducing the national models of the Western countries. Worst-case scenario, it could undermine their political neutrality. Some people also believe that trilateral arrangements are dangerous because it can be dominated by the agendas of the traditional donors and the interests of the beneficiary countries could be overlooked. However, a trilateral cooperation could be a way to strengthen the programs because developed countries have insight in the challenges facing countries like Brazil. Like ODI writes in their article: *for example when it comes to include institution-building, performance monitoring and accountability.*

The picture of Brazil as an emerging donor is remarkably complex. Though there are more steps to take towards a better foreign policy, Brazil has shown how a developing country can prosper into one of the most upcoming and powerful countries in the world. With all the knowledge and experiences from this process it is a valuable resource, which ought to be shared with the developing world. Some might even say that even though it has its own issues, Brazil could function as a model for other developing countries, learning from their mistakes as well as their progress, and growing by example.

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Human development in a climate changed world: Issues and Options for Uganda

Human development challenges under a changing climate require approaches that can live up to this new global challenge

KIMBOWA RICHARD

Investing in human development is good for the environment as a knowledgeable society is likely to respond to emerging livelihood opportunities. However, while human development has been defined as expanding choices so that people can have full and creative lives (UNDP, 1990), this process remains hampered by climate change impacts that are local and global.

In Uganda, the immediate impact of this is poverty (which can also be held responsible for climate change due to degradation of forests, land and other resources in search of fuel wood, water and others).

In this sense, human development challenges under a changing climate require approaches that can live up to this new global challenge. This is because a new 'dynamism' has been set that impacts on creative lives (hence severing options to fight poverty) while significantly limiting the matrix of choices that people have.

In some cases the intricacies of climate change impacts remain poorly understood, affecting planning decisions in terms of the right kind of resources that will be required as well as the relevant human resource capacity (quality and quantity) that will be needed in the years to come.

As a result Uganda, like many developing countries remain largely unprepared and vulnerable to the consequences of climate change.

With examples from Uganda, this article discusses the human development needs in light of climate change, and urges for the role of the international community to support related human development needs.

What are the human developments needs to cope with climate change?

Human development in the face of climate change in Uganda requires sustained investment in key social sectors of education, health, agriculture, water supply and sanitation. This needs to be scaled up to levels close to those of the economic sectors, if we are to have sustained growth that can be passed from this generation to another without major lapses.

Hence, the focus on continuous formal and informal awareness raising on the climate change and what communities can do; training and skills building; technology and knowledge transfer, are key to this long-term process.

More opportunities to training and skills development

In the same way that education needs are continuously tailored to the economy, Uganda needs to do the same for social development.

As Table 1 (below) indicates, the challenge for Uganda in human development related to environmental management, relates to *ignorance on opportunities, lack of skills and unemployment, ignorance and lack of information, limited education, and marginalisation of vulnerable categories.*



The starting point to 'break' this cycle is to secure more education opportunities for children and adults, that are also tailored to social, economic and environmental needs and emerging challenges like climate change. This will hopefully prompt communities to look out for information related to options and opportunities to survive and to continue thriving on the environment on which they depend now and in the long-run.

Related to education is the need to scale up negotiation and advocacy skills for vulnerable communities. Many such social groups lack the basic skills, platforms and opportunities to voice their concerns in a world that is increasingly market-driven. This means that the powerful businesses entities always have a leeway in any desired undertaking.

To counter this, poor women and youths, indigenous groups like the Batwa in Western Uganda, the elderly and disabled who are impacted on differently will need to be equipped with 'survival skills' (including those in negotiation and advocacy), in order to influence decisions and plans in their favour.

Continuous formal and informal awareness rising

The level of awareness on the effects of climate change among communities varies greatly across social groups and age-groups. For example, changes in climate are not noticed by Ugandans in isolation from broader environmental changes.

People in Uganda are keenly aware of environmental degradation and natural resource depletion (BBC Trust, 2010). They often make little distinction between environmental degradation and climate change. Drought and food scarcity are causing frustration and despair across Uganda. Farmers, fishermen and pastoralists do not know how they would cope if these problems became worse.

The implication for human development for Uganda is that a new form of awareness and education that addresses these challenges is inevitable and actually long overdue. For example, weather forecasting, seasonal and daily prediction to farmers (even if packaged in simple formats) to enable them take short-term decisions on types of crops/varieties be planted, requires

a level of understanding and interpretation (for example decisions on timeliness on specific farming activities in line with the seasonal forecast).

District and Region	Environmental causes	Human development causes
Rakai (Central)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vermin from forests destroy crops • Natural disaster (floods and drought) leading to increased expenditure on drugs, scarcity of pasture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor health • Diseases like HIV / AIDS
Bugiri (Eastern)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No land • Soil exhaustion • Pests and Vermin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ignorance on opportunities • Diseases
Moroto (Northern)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drought causes crop failure leading to lack of food • Climatic shock (too much rain leading to crop wash) and subsequent food shortage • Shortage of water and pasture leads to death of livestock • Landlessness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of skills and unemployment • Ill health and diseases
Bundibugyo (Western)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural disasters such as floods, landslides causing destruction of crops • Harsh weather conditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ignorance and lack of information • Limited education • Marginalisation of vulnerable categories

Table 1: Environment and Human Development causes of poverty in Uganda

Source: Uganda Human Development Report, 2005

Technology and Knowledge transfer: the case of agriculture

The development and effective diffusion of new agricultural practices and technologies will largely shape how and how well farmers mitigate and adapt to climate change. This adaptation and mitigation potential is expected to be more pronounced in developing countries where agricultural productivity remains low; poverty, vulnerability and food insecurity remain high; and the direct effects of climate change are expected to be especially harsh (ICTSD, 2010).

ICTSD (2010) further notes that creating the necessary agricultural technologies and harnessing them to enable developing countries to adapt their agricultural systems to changing climate will require innovations in policy and institutions. In this context, institutions and policies are important at multiple scales. But there are impediments to the development, diffusion and use of relevant technologies that can surface at several levels – from the inception and innovation stages to the transfer of technologies and the access to agricultural innovations by vulnerable smallholders in developing countries. This also points to the level of awareness

“the gravity of climate change impacts is immense and would not enable developing countries alone to build a human resource base to counteract it in the short-run”

“The development and effective diffusion of new agricultural practices and technologies will largely shape how and how well farmers mitigate and adapt to climate change”

and education in society, which might result in a ‘skewed’ adoption curve in favour of minority early adopters. Efforts will therefore be needed to ‘adjust’ this curve towards more adopters as a human development intervention strategy, to cope with climate change impacts on agriculture and related sectors of energy for rural development, water supply and sanitation.

The role of the International community: Technology transfer and financing

But in all the above the external influence wielded by the international community remains enormous. Hence, it is important that the international community concurrently play their part in relation to human development, as developing countries like Uganda adjust to the new climate change realities. These include support to technology and knowledge transfer, as well as financing related human development:

- *Providing a supportive environment for technology transfer and knowledge transfer processes*

There is a need to address constraints to transferring technological innovations from the North to the South; and within the South. For example, negotiations on social and environmentally responsive Intellectual property (IP) regimes that do not constrain technology transfer under the UN, World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the UN Climate Change negotiations are needed.

- *Financing human development to counteract climate change*

As noted above the gravity of climate change impacts is immense and would not enable developing countries alone to build a human resource base to counteract it in the short-run.

Hence the international community remains with the responsibility to support developing countries to address disasters arising from climate change impacts, scaling-up coping mechanisms identified, support technology research, development and transfer, support skills development and providing the necessary tools, equipment and infrastructure to relieve the impacts of climate change. (Kimbowa is GSDM's Country Correspondent for Uganda can be reached at kimbowarichard@yahoo.com)

Claiming one half of the future

An examination of the challenges for the women of the Middle East and North Africa

CATRIONA KNAPMAN

Many Western media commentators seem surprised at the images of women protestors in the recent Middle East and North Africa (MENA) uprisings. This perhaps says more about the Western broadcasters than it does about the women protestors. Indeed, women across the MENA region have been involved for many years advocating for law reform, equal opportunities and equal treatment. For example, in Egypt, the women's movement has been active since the early 1900s, progressively achieving rights for women in areas such as divorce, child custody and employment. In 1957 President Bourguiba granted Tunisian women rights beyond those which contemporary Western women enjoyed. Women also played important roles in the independence struggles in North Africa and have an increasingly important place in national economic growth.

Yet the stereotypical image of the suppressed Arab woman is a myth with some truth. Women's rights issues are often closely linked to religious principles and as such are a difficult arena for reform. One aspect of this stagnancy is a lack of women in key public positions. For example, Inter-Parliamentary Union statistics reveal Arab countries to have the lowest percentage of women members of Parliament in the world. Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Oman have no women Parliamentarians. Yet Iraq and United Arab Emirates have 25.2% and 22.5% women respectively; above many European countries and the United States of America.¹ Indeed, there is diversity across the region and stereotypes do not always ring true. Yet framing the discussion of women's rights within the tenants of Islam risks placing religious interpretations above achieving equality. This issue is particular to Muslim countries and can slow progress in equality for women, even in the current climate of political uncertainty.

Women's groups petitioned for women to be included in the recent constitutional reform committee in Egypt. This would have reflected the role played by women bloggers, activists and citizens in the protests and the many educated and qualified women in the country. Yet only men were selected for the final committee. As such, women were denied an opportunity to participate in these important constitutional reforms. The same is true for new Ministry positions in Egypt: only one of which was granted to a woman (Fayza Mohamed Abounaga, Minister of Planning and International Cooperation). Furthermore, the new constitution implies that only men can occupy the role of President. These events illustrate social and governmental reluctance to include women's voices in the formal decision making process. Amnesty International has also highlighted incidents of Involuntary Virginity Testing (IVT) of women protestors in Egypt. Alongside the humiliation of the testing: the protestors were threatened with prostitution charges.²

Such treatment creates social pressure on women, discrediting and endangering women protestors and subtly attempting to control their freedom of assembly and expression.



Women in the MENA are currently presented with both great opportunity and great risk. The uncertainty regarding the future of countries has opened new spaces for public debate allowing women the opportunity to express and claim their rights. Yet this opportunity if coupled with the danger of being shouted down. Such was the case on 8 March on International Women's Day. Egyptian women organised protests which demanded women's rights as part of the new Egyptian state. A group of men physically attacked the women and accused them of acting against Islam. Indeed, for women in MENA countries the fight against autocracy is only the first battle; the next will be against power structures which exist not only in society, law, religion and governance but also in the hearts and minds of their male compatriots and to some extent in themselves.

“for women in MENA countries the fight against autocracy is only the first battle; the next will be against power structures which exist not only in society, law, religion and governance but also in the hearts and minds of their male compatriots and to some extent in themselves”

The images of the women in the Middle East uprisings represent a wider movement of women's campaigning across the Middle East. These movements are long standing, hard working campaigns for equality. Thus, the participation of women in the protests for democracy is a reflection of a status quo: not a victory in itself. For women in the Middle East to claim equality a long battle still lies ahead in public debates. It requires defending religious interpretations which support equality and claiming representation in public governance. Yet it also reaches beyond public debate to private everyday behaviour, to long-held beliefs or practices which go to the heart of every man and woman in the region. If women are to succeed they must shake off tradition and claim new unfamiliar behaviour as their own. Men must become allies not enemies in this process. Indeed men in the region must not forget that a fully democratic society requires an equal place for women. (Catriona is Global South Development Magazine's Regional Editor for the Middle East and can be reached at catriona.knapman@btinternet.com)

¹ See the Inter-Parliamentary Union for full statistics: <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>

² See Amnesty International: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/egypt-admission-forced-virginity-tests-must-lead-justice-2011-05-31>

“There’s no easy way out of the violence. It’s profoundly structural”

Our Latin America Editor Ioulia Fenton interviews Ryan Riedel, a cyclist for change at US-Mexico border and the author of upcoming book *Border 101*

We are now in a time when even the Obama administration’s only focus on immigration is to make the US border with Mexico “more secure than ever” as the President exclaimed it to be in a speech on the 10th May. This type of policy is wildly alienating for Latino supporters who were promised what New York Times called on the 7th June “a path to citizenship for the estimated 11 million of immigrants already [in the US] illegally”. Immigration policy results in thousands of deaths for those trying to cross the border to seek a better life and those desperate enough to be the poverty stricken prey for drug barons and human trafficking bottom-feeding hyenas.

Global South Development Magazine’s Latin America Editor **Ioulia Fenton** recently met with and interviewed an inspirational young man who dedicated half a decade of his life to getting to the bottom of this complex milieu of issues surrounding immigration. His insights are enlightening to what the securitization of US-Mexico border has meant for the people living in, out and across it.

Ryan Riedel, a self-named ‘cyclist for change’ spent best part of five years travelling the US-Mexico border to immerse himself in border politics and border realities. He is now writing *Border 101* as his attempt to bring the border to those who can’t or won’t go to her. *Border 101* “is a mosaic of lessons learned, as I attempt to tell it in one hundred and one narratives of the people with whom I shared my life,” says Ryan. The work is divided into as many parts and includes oral histories in the form of transcribed conversations, and some of Ryan’s own writings so as to provide both context and analysis up to the present. “But I also talk about farting and donkey penises. *Border 101* is not your normal border book,” he explains. Below is an excerpt from Ioulia’s conversation with Ryan:

Would you be so kind as to start off with a little bit about your personal background, so we can get to know the man behind *Border 101*?

Well, first of all, thank you very much the opportunity to contribute to your review, Ioulia. It’s a privilege to be able to share some of my experience with a readership committed to issues of development and social justice throughout the Global South and, more specifically, the Americas.

I am a native to the suburbs of Phoenix, Arizona, although I grew up criss-crossing the U.S.-Mexico border to visit my maternal grandparents and extended family in the two Nogales of Arizona and Sonora, Mexico. I think that it because of some of my first memories of children, my age, selling gum and cigarettes to tourists on the street that I eventually decided to return to the divide on a bicycle and write a book, which I’m calling *Border 101*.

What led to you undertaking your US-Mexico border ride?

I had just graduated from Arizona State University when I entered into what I call my “pre-life” crisis, which, I think, is particularly American. I earned degrees in Spanish and Religious Studies, but I didn’t really know what to do with them. I hadn’t much life experience outside of the academy, although I was thoroughly immersed in Arizona politics, especially immigration. Since Operations Hold-the-Line and Gatekeeper were put into effect, in El Paso (1993) and San Diego (1994), respectively, then Safeguard in Southern Arizona (1998), undocumented migrants to the United States were redirected from traditional urban crossing points to rural deserts. The Mexican Secretariat of Foreign Affairs reports that over forty-five hundred would-be crossers have died from the funnel effect created as a result of the construction of the operations’ border walls and heightened policing. Frequently, I heard about the “immigrant flood” on the local news. I wanted to see for myself.

On a lark, however, I moved up to Cheyenne, Wyoming to visit a friend. I got a job selling shoes at an outdoors store. There, I met a young man who was cycling across the United States, and my own wheels started turning. I bought a bicycle. I bought some camping gear. I decided to ride the entire U.S.-Mexico

“I felt that the best way to understand ‘border’ was not as threat or abstraction, but rather in community with the people for which it was an everyday reality”

“Then I saw Border Patrol helicopters ‘dusting’ (scattering) migrants in the middle of the desert. Train-hopping Central American amputees in Oaxaca. An eight-year boy from Honduras walking, without shoes, to the United States from Chiapas. The dead man in the Rio Grande”

“The migrants wanted to share their stories. They wanted to tell people who wouldn’t normally listen about why they had decided to leave their families and risk life and limb for harrowing journeys northward”

border and record conversations with people who lived, worked and travelled along it. I started by asking community organizers, students and “amas de casa” (which we call “housewives” but are anything) about the changes they want to see in their communities. Then someone stole my bike, my audio recorder broke, and I had to start all over. Probably the best thing that could have happened at the time.

Why’s that? How long did it take? Was it a continuous journey?

I had to take a step back and refocus. The work was predicated on the idea that “people too, know things”, as Paulo Freire said. Given how mainstream media had cultivated a culture of fear in a post-9-11 world, especially around drug- and migrant-trafficking, and the degree to which reasoned “debate” on so-called “comprehensive immigration reform” was virtually non-existent, I felt that the best way to understand “border” was not as threat or abstraction, but rather in community with the people for which it was an everyday reality. I eventually left the bike altogether to work on various, long(er)-term projects: legal observing of the 2006 Minutemen, service with Spectrum Ministries, Inc., in Tijuana, picking cantaloupes with H-2A guest workers. Early setbacks made it easier to give up the breadth of a cycling adventure to build more profound relationships and a better understanding of issues in context.

I thought that I was going to be on the border for three months. Two years later, I was protesting the arrival of then-President George W. Bush in Guatemala City. It’s been a few years since that I’ve been able to sit down and write about it all.

What were some of the biggest lessons you learned?

Don’t lock your bike to a barb-wire fence. You *can* live off of convenience-store SpaghettiOs. Bring enough patches in the case that your tube deflates and you’re stuck by the road in middle of nowhere, with no one around and no recourse but to

walk fifteen miles to the next town. Those lessons stick, I’ll tell you.

What are some of the most shocking things you saw?

Early on, a union organizer whom I met in Matamoros, Tamaulipas took me to the city’s dump. I knew that border cities were among the most deficient in terms of infrastructure, with rapid population growth over the last fifty years, but it wasn’t until I saw a toxic cloud hanging overhead that I had a sense of it. I stepped out of the organizer’s car, and she warned me to be careful—to avoid the flames bursting from my own footprints. The local government blamed trash pickers for the fires, she said, because they burned the plastic coating from copper wires to turn the material for a profit. But even near-constant bonfires couldn’t create that haze. She showed me the waste pits from the massive, primarily foreign-owned factories that grew exponentially along the border after the signing of NAFTA in 1994. As a result of the lack of environmental controls, the “maquiladoras” illegally dispose of their waste in the dump. The trash self-combusts, and the scavengers get the blame for it.

Then I saw Border Patrol helicopters “dusting” (scattering) migrants in the middle of the desert. Train-hopping Central American amputees in Oaxaca. An eight-year boy from Honduras walking, without shoes, to the United States from Chiapas. The dead man in the Rio Grande. As *Border 101* progressed, I spent more and more time with immigrant communities through the Mexican borderlands. There’s something about being in liminal space that brings people together—family, where you least expect it. The migrants wanted to share their stories. They wanted to tell people who wouldn’t normally listen about why they had decided to leave their families and risk life and limb for harrowing journeys northward.

For my part, I was constantly surprised at the sense of home I felt with the working and walking poor and then, for example, the outstanding hate of professedly anti-immigrant vigilantes. The majority of the Minutemen, past and present, aren’t much better off than their Mexican and Central American counterparts. They are mostly lower- and middle-class, “average Americans”, dedicated to protecting political and economic interests that so often fail to protect them. Yet instead of identifying with the trash pickers and migrants who share in their common exploitation, these so-called “Patriots” scapegoat in the name of “national sovereignty” and do the dirty work of an increasingly corporate state. I find the ethic short-sighted, pervasive and confounding.

Could you talk a little about some of the meetings you had with movement leaders and participants like the Zapatistas?

Sure. To speak primarily to my experience with the Zapatistas, for a month I had the great privilege of serving as journalist with the 2006 Otra Campaña, a Zapatista-sponsored, non-electoral campaign intended as an alternative to the farce of representative democracy in Mexico. Alongside the Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, the spokesperson for the organization, our alternative press corps toured throughout the Mexican north and reported on hundreds of instances of what the Subcomandante calls the “four wheels of neoliberalism”: dispossession, repression, disregard and exploitation. Incredibly ambitious, the Otra meant to be a catalyst for “other”, effectively disenfranchised communities to organize and form a national network. Unfortunately, it met with only limited success.

To the present, the Subcomandante has claimed that the Zapatista movement “is no longer fashionable”, which is not to

say, however, irrelevant. The communities in Chiapas are still very much active in their self-governing style of participatory democracy as the foundation of good government. The greatest threat to the organization's growth isn't so much the lack of national or international support, but rather internal divisions as a result of immigration to the United States. The Subcomandante also released a series of letters which thoroughly denounced Mexican President Felipe Calderón's absurd offensive against drug-traffickers and his own people. Over 35,000 have died since his declaration that "we work to win the war on crime", four days after his inauguration in 2006. The Zapatistas feel the stresses of immigration and narco- (and state-) violence along with the rest of the Mexico.

Where do you stand on the immigration debate in the US?

In the immigration debate, there are lessons that we can learn from the Zapatista ethic of "leading by obeying", primarily when it comes to vetting community concerns, educating, and developing consensus. The reality is that there is little debate about immigration in the United States, because discussion is so often co-opted by rhetoric and myth. The debate is locked between two tensions: on the one hand, humanitarian motivations to reunite families, remove migrants from needless suffering and death, protect them in the workplace, and provide paths for documentation, i.e. legalization. And on the other hand, "get-tough" provisions for security and amplified border enforcement, i.e. the construction of long-term, privately operated detention facilities, the criminalization of migrants, and the hiring of more and more Border Patrol agents.

There is, however, little sense to greater policing. If anything, such measures retard restrictionists' own goals, because migration, like drugs, is a market issue. As militarization along the border increases, so too do the costs to cross. As most migrants are simply unable to apply for visas and documented status, they choose to stay in the United States instead of returning to their communities of origin. Meanwhile, President Obama has yet to take any action, apart from deporting more people than any previous administration and allowing for the replication of divisive and oftentimes unconstitutional, state-level anti-immigrant policy. What's even more alarming, with respect to my home state, is a recent Arizona state bill that allows for the construction of border walls with private funding, which seems to me an open invitation for all manner of profiteers—private contractors and narco-traffickers alike.

Contractors will continue to benefit from the industry of bad policy and the need to keep newly criminalized migrants out of the country or in detention, while narcos have demonstrated the most flexible and developed infrastructure to accommodate the rising costs of a consolidated market.

In your eyes, what are some of the biggest injustices created and perpetuated across the border?

Obviously immigration is an issue I care a lot about, but I think that narco- (and state-) related violence takes the cake right now. I can't emphasize that point enough: the Calderón Administration shares in the culpability, to such an extent that hundreds of thousands recently marched upon Mexico City and Ciudad Juárez to protest both the government and traffickers. Laura Carlsen, Director of the Americas Program of the Center



Close to the Dessert: A migrant crossing New Mexico desert on Christmas Eve to minimize chances of being caught. Photo: Armando/BorderFilmProject.com

for International Policy, argues that the war on drugs is unwinnable. “As long as a lucrative market exists, the cartels will find a way to serve it. Eliminating operatives, even high-level leaders, merely diversifies and redistributes the business.”

“The debate is locked between two tensions: on the one hand, humanitarian motivations to reunite families, remove migrants from needless suffering and death, protect them in the workplace, and provide paths for documentation, i.e. legalization. And on the other hand, “get-tough” provisions for security and amplified border enforcement, i.e. the construction of long-term, privately operated detention facilities, the criminalization of migrants, and the hiring of more and more Border Patrol agents”

Calderón’s preposterous war not only tears at the fabric of Mexican society but also ignores the root cause of the violence: again, money, here from the consumption of drugs in the United States. Perhaps more damning is idea that Calderón is well aware that he can neither win nor end the war, but instead colludes with corrupt elite both north and south of the border: those corporate heads who profit from the 1.3 billion dollars of military contracts proposed by the Merida Initiative, as well as government officials who lauder money from a five billion-a-year business that employs half a million people, 150 thousand of which are armed. According to James Martín Cypher, a professor at the Autonomous University of Zacatecas, there are eighty-eight workers active in the informal economy for every hundred legally contracted. There’s no easy way out of the violence. It’s profoundly structural.

Where do you think the solutions lie?

With both drugs and immigration, it’s almost easier to discuss where they *don’t*—militarization isn’t working, executive inaction isn’t working, and Department of Homeland Security initiatives like “Secure Communities” aren’t working. “The heart of the concern is that the program, conceived of as a method of targeting those who pose the greatest threat to our communities,” wrote the counsel of New York Governor Andrew Cuomo recently, “is in fact having the opposite effect and compromising public safety by deterring witnesses to crime and others from working with law enforcement.” Undocumented migrants would rather criminals walk than risk deportation by allowing police to take their testimonies and review their status. This is one of the many consequences of poor policy. New York intends to quit the program, as does Massachusetts and others.

With drugs, Carlsen suggests that we start by following the money, increasing funding for abuse prevention and treatment, ending prohibition (beginning with marijuana), and giving communities a role besides “victim”. Charles Bowden, perhaps the greatest border writer of them all, argues similarly that the

United States should end the prohibition on drugs, as well as remodel NAFTA and stop saying pieties about immigration reform, which seek to undermine the human rights framework of both countries. Two-thousand words in, and I haven’t even mentioned the imbalances concretized under NAFTA or the hypocrisy of a system that makes it easier for goods (and drugs, by extension) to cross the border while excluding the hands that manufacture them.

“Instead of wars on drugs and immigrants, I’d love to propose a war, however rhetorical, on money—on the interests that perpetuate racial and class divisions within our communities, both at home and across borders”

“We have to continue to develop strategic, international networks of solidarity and opposition”

With immigration, Obama has to pursue policies that speak to the reality of nearly twelve million undocumented migrants in the United States, the first of which would be the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act. The DREAM Act would grant permanent residency to students who arrived either with proper documentation or as minors, have been in the country continuously for at least five years prior to the bill’s enactment, and graduate from U.S. high schools. Perhaps surprisingly, Obama might also take a cue from the recently enacted Mexican law that prohibits the Federal Police from detaining undocumented migrants, allows for humanitarian aid and legal recourse, and provides permits for migrants to live and work in the country. Such legislation is a huge step forward for a country rife with abuse along its own southern border.

Instead of wars on drugs and immigrants, I’d love to propose a war, however rhetorical, on money—on the interests that perpetuate racial and class divisions within our communities, both at home and across borders. We have to make the connections between a violent, even cannibalistic economic model and the violence that serves to protect it. We have to continue to develop strategic, international networks of solidarity and opposition. And we have to rethink policy not in terms of “us” and “them”, but rather as densely interrelated and part of larger, global family.

“Family”. The distinction almost seems trite. But with regard to your earlier question about hope, well, I’m encouraged by those children of the border who strive to build communities that protect basic human rights—“housing, land, work, bread, health, education, independence, democracy, freedom,” the Subcomandante Marcos said in the Fourth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle. And those children are many.

(For more information on the book’s progress, photographs and sample writings please visit border101.blogspot.com, and GSDM’s Latin America Editor Ioulia Fenton can be reached at iouliafenton@gmail.com)

Bodies in the River don't make the five o'clock

Ryan's reflections on his time in Laredo, Texas

I still see the body of the dead man in the Rio Grande.

I was with the South Texas Environmental Education and Research program, STEER, collecting water samples in the contaminated Rio Grande.

Upstream, a group of children shouted to us, "hay un mojado", "hay un mojado"—literally, "there's a wet" or "wetback". Contextually, "there's a crosser". Our group didn't know what to make of them at first. Were the kids really saying what we thought they were saying? Did they really mean what we thought they meant?

Alone, I walked towards the kids as they came our way. All suspicions were confirmed. With a modest net in tow, they intended to go fishing. Their catch of the day: an "hombre muerto"—a "dead man".

I walked up the river with them. We strode down the shore, chattering, crawled under a barb wire fence and jumped over gullies. The walk seemed so deliberate, so filled with anxiety.

We arrived at the body, and we stopped. Just stopped. The kind of pause that you see in the movies, when the detectives walk into the room with the corpse and halt in mid-stride, transfixed. They take slow looks around and even slower steps forward. Whispering about in furtive hypotheses, they return to normal time.

The body was red and black, burnt by the sun and charred with decay. The man's hands were taut and sinewy. You could see his bones through thin layers of muscle. His torso was bloated, raw and yellowish by the waistline of his black running shorts. A hole in his exposed back, along his spine and directly between his shoulder blades, was bubbling like some festering geyser. The man's body was giving one last and long exhale.

I called nine-one-one. I took pictures. Numb and quiet, the children walked away, perched on a small island in the distance.

I looked at the body, face down and unmoving. Get up, I couldn't help thinking. Why wouldn't he get up? Get up.

He didn't.

The students of STEER arrived with hushed laughter and then milled about soberly, examining the body, before they joined the children. Would he get up for them?

He didn't.

There are two stories to this man's death. The first: he was murdered.

Next to the man was a shopping cart, upturned and sinking into the earth along with its unanticipated partner. Had one wanted to kill the man and discard of the body in the river, a shopping cart might have been a sufficient, however unlikely, vehicle to navigate the maze of undergrowth in the hills above. A final heave of the cart might have left the man prone, sprawled and perpendicular to the shoreline.

In 2006, when we came across the dead man, an average of two homicides was committed in Nuevo Laredo every three days because of exceptional drug-related violence. Some of that violence occurred in its American sister, Laredo, but at a number that paled in comparison: twenty-one.

The body lacked visible signs of trauma, however, and the cart would have been difficult if not impossible to squeeze through thick scrub. The river was strong enough to carry both cart and body miles from upstream. More likely, the man died while trying to cross the river. Thus the second story: he drowned.

According to official counts by the Border Patrol, 472 people died trying to cross into the United States in 2006, forty-nine in Laredo. Unofficial counts put the total much higher—around 800. Oft-referred to "mojados" cross for many reasons: some haul drugs, some reunite with family, but most seek jobs. The river can be unforgiving in these ventures. It swells with irrigation water, whorls in unseen whirlpools and charges with undercurrents. Most know its dangers, but few of these economic refugees expect to confront them on their life-or-death ventures northward.

Face-down in the mud, the man had no other choice.

I suspect migration over murder in this case, but I'll never know for sure.

As I walked back downstream, past the bras and panties, shorts, candy wrappers and plastic bags of successful crossers, I spoke with Roger Perales, the director of STEER. A decade-long regular of the water sampling trips, he had encountered two other, would-be crossers. The first was a body, much like the one we just saw. The second was a skeleton, bleached by the sun and adorned with a burial shroud of swimming trunks.

Roger wished that migrants could find a safer way to cross.

"You know what the weird thing is?" he asked. "We talk about the wages in Mexico, as far as NAFTA and all that. I'll tell you my personal opinion. Even if they raise wages some, some of the companies are moving because they still can't compete. They still have to move to other parts of the world, where labor's even cheaper. And they're not paying much here, y'know?"

Roger stopped and turned around, facing me. "It all comes back to the consumer," he said.

"How much are you willing to pay?"

While the college group finished collecting samples, I sat and wrote, trying to collect my thoughts.

Hundreds of migrants must have passed through that spot—an enclave of desert thicket, discarded clothing and trash bags, trash bags and more trash bags. Water-proof carry-alls for each person who swam the river.

Trash bags were everywhere: at my feet, among the empty bags of Ramen and potato chips; at my side, wrapped around the trunk of a tree; and overhead among dense, interlocking branches, dangling like cheap party decorations and dancing like phantoms.

I scribbled haltingly, imagining forty-nine bodies stacked one by one by one, placed next to each other in a long string of compounded, irreconcilable failure—the deaths multiplied, riverside. I thought of migrants back home in Arizona—282 in 2006 alone—emptied, withered and wasted, leaning against saguaros and swimming through sandy deserts. I thought of the man upstream, and after a while I didn't think any more.

I looked to my right and watched the river. It seemed so peaceful. Peaceful, comforting and inviting.

The death wasn't reported in the American news that day. Bodies in the river don't usually make the five o'clock.

A Nuevo Laredo-based newspaper, *La Tarde*, carried a story about the "Mortal Río Bravo"—the "Deadly Río Grande". The headline on the cover: "Six undocumented immigrants have died in the murderous waters of the Río Grande, in only the last two and a half months. The river has become deadly for those migrants who desire to attain the 'American Dream'."

What that dream is, I don't know. The America I know is torn between border walls and family, free trade and free movement of workers, the threat of narco-terrorism and the boon of international remittances, commerce, industry.

Is the American Dream defined by money? By a sense of security? Freedom?

Or is the American Dream an ethic? A core value of achievement despite all obstacles?

Achievement can be raw profit. Achievement can be mouths fed. Achievement can mean making it into the upper-middle class of American society, or maybe just making it across the river.

No one—no one—deserves to die like this. The Mexican Secretariat of Foreign Relations estimates that 5,607 would-be migrants have died as a result of the "funnel effect" created by increased security measures in traditional urban crossing points along the border. The Obama Administration has to do more than deliver vague speeches calling for immigration reform and "good faith" cooperation from the Republicans, when record deportations underscore the Department of Homeland Security's current enforcement-first policy.

Perhaps we have to stop dreaming altogether and wake up, get up, and face the reality of polluted deaths in a polluted river.

So pathetic, so worthless.

As we bounced along the dirt road leading back to the city, our university van came upon two squad cars meandering down to the river. A lone policewoman drove by in the first car. Four men drove by in the second—two officers in the front, and another two, twenty-something men in the back (or were they two of the children?). The drivers stopped and exited their vehicles to discuss the whereabouts of the body.

I imagine that there were no other questions. There was no investigation. For them, case closed: the man had drowned.

The cars began to pull away. As the students joked about Jennifer Lopez and reality television, I stuck my head out the window in the rear of the van. "It's down by the shopping cart," I shouted. "The shopping cart!"

Heads nodded in each of the three cars. We all knew.

That day, in passing, I told a man about the dead body on the river. "Yeah," he said. "That happens a lot." He turned away and went on with his business.

"Another floater," he mumbled.

Get up.

(For more visit border101.blogspot.com)

Redefining Education in Guatemala

APARNA PATANKAR

The 1996 Peace Accords, which ended Guatemala's brutal thirty-six year Civil War, mandated that education and training programs be implemented to redress economic and social inequalities between the *ladino* or non-indigenous populations and the indigenous Mayan populations, who had suffered the most during the war. The government, however, still struggles to move these reforms past urban areas and bring quality education to rural areas where it is needed most. This article examines government and NGO efforts to provide quality education and takes a closer look at what education truly means and what needs to be done to empower these rural, Mayan students and their communities.

A 2008 World Bank study found that the rate of Guatemalan children who complete primary education is the second lowest in Latin America, and significantly lower than levels in Honduras and Bolivia, countries with lower GDP per capita. According to the UN Development Program, 95% of Mayan women never finish primary school. Further, only 68% of rural, Mayan young women are even literate, compared with 97% of urban, *ladino* young men.

The government has attempted to increase educational opportunities in rural, indigenous communities in several ways. One of its programs, PRONADE, looked to increase ownership of education by creating family-based and community-run schools. Unfortunately, because much of the school funding had to come directly from the poor communities themselves, the infrastructure and teaching quality in PRONADE schools turned out to be worse than that of national, government-run schools.

The government also adopted Telesecundaria, a technology based teaching methodology developed in Mexico. Telesecundaria is used in poor, rural areas that lack qualified teachers and uses television programs to teach students. Students watch a television program then complete the accompanying activities. Teachers serve as facilitators more than instructors and can monitor several classes at once.

While PRONADE and Telesecundaria increased educational coverage, Ministry of Education officials and NGO partners agree that they failed to provide these rural, indigenous communities with the same quality of education enjoyed in urban areas. In examining these programs it is important to ask "what is the final goal of education?"

Since the programs focused on increasing coverage in order to meet international pressures of the second Millennium Development Goal of access to universal primary education and the Peace Accords mandate of redressing imbalances, the answer appears to be increased school attendance. A numbers-focused quantitative approach allows the

government to claim them as viable educational options, yet does nothing to increase opportunity or quality of life. One of the biggest barriers to education in Guatemala is convincing parents that long term gains from education outweigh their children's short term contribution to household income and food security. A lackluster elementary education is far less valuable than the revenue produced from a child



"One of the biggest barriers to education in Guatemala is convincing parents that long term gains from education outweigh their children's short term contribution to household income and food security"

"the Guatemalan national curriculum is tailored to urban students, teaching them administrative or secretarial skills. The job skills that urban, *ladino* students learn are not necessarily relevant to the reality of impoverished, rural, Mayan students"

working in the field. Parents look at this as an investment, and are highly skeptical of the opportunity cost of an education if it does not lead to true opportunity.

To combat this problem, the organization Ak'Tenamit takes a different approach to education and community development. As its founder, Steve Dudenhofer stated, "[e]ducation is about so much more than just building four walls and a roof, you have to really think about what these kids are learning in school and what opportunities you're creating for them." Ak'Tenamit recognizes that the Guatemalan national curriculum is tailored to urban students, teaching them administrative or secretarial skills. The job skills that urban, *ladino* students learn are not necessarily relevant to the reality of impoverished, rural, Mayan students. If these Mayan students study hard and succeed in school, they will end up in jobs outside their communities, resulting in a brain drain from the rural to urban areas.



“Ak’Tenamit degrees combine a class model that emphasizes collaboration, consensus building, and public speaking with vocational training and practical experience working in restaurants, national parks, or with other non-profit organizations. Students do chores and assist in maintaining the center to help pay for their education. Students learn sustainable agriculture and tourism techniques, creation of local food sources, and sustainable utilization of national resources. The value of this type of learning extends far and wide, as often times it is subsequently implemented in that students own community”

The goals of the Ak’ Tenamit educational programs are to change cultural attitudes towards education, particularly female education and create real opportunities for their students to work in and improve these communities themselves. This model provides a unique take on community development by training students to be the leaders to increase education and quality of life in their own communities and thus acts as a two-pronged attack on the social and economic inequities that Mayan populations face.

Ak’Tenamit worked with education experts, academics, business owners, and Mayan leaders and considered the reality of the area around their educational center in Izabal, Rio Dulce to create one middle school and two high school degrees that focus on rural wellbeing and sustainable tourism. These degrees combine a class model that emphasizes collaboration, consensus building, and public speaking with vocational training and practical experience working in restaurants, national parks, or with other non-profit organizations. Students do chores and assist in maintaining the center to help pay for their education. Students learn sustainable agriculture and tourism techniques, creation of local food sources, and sustainable utilization of national resources. The value of this type of learning extends far and wide, as often times it is subsequently implemented in that students own community. Ak’Tenamit’s focus is to create a space in which bright Mayan students – both male and female – can do development work in their rural communities.

Ak’Tenamit is achieving these goals and perpetuating a cycle of education and community development. Many of their graduates send their wages back to their families, so that their younger siblings can also study. These students return to their communities and show their families, neighbors, and friends the opportunities that education created for them and serve as evidence of the power of knowledge and learning.

An added benefit of this program is that many students take it upon themselves to further improve their community. One example of this is a young man named Luis, from a community called Chisec, where as a young boy he worked in the central park shining the shoes of sex workers. Luis received a scholarship to study sustainable tourism at Ak’Tenamit’s center. Through his studies, he got involved with a group called “Proyecto Payasos”, which works in communities to teach sexual responsibility, and to open a dialogue around HIV, which

devastates these rural, indigenous communities. He began to relate this work back to his experience shining the shoes of sex workers in Chisec. Luis is now working to start an NGO in his community that will dispense knowledge and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases. He credits the working women with socializing him and believes it is his responsibility to return and help them.

Ak’Tenamit creates exciting opportunities for their students by teaching students to relate what is happening at the local level to the global level. One of their graduates, Mirza, serves on the Ak’Tenamit board and promotes the right of indigenous women to education. Mirza also participates in anti-climate change research, which has allowed her to travel throughout Central America and even as far as Europe. The opportunity to travel and to participate in such impactful work is something that, unfortunately, most Mayan girls will never get the chance to experience.

Ak’Tenamit’s model makes a huge impact and inspires change in the communities in which they work. This February, Ak’Tenamit suffered a great tragedy when one of their brightest, most passionate graduates was murdered. Catalina Mucú Maas studied rural wellbeing and was one of the first young women in her community to graduate from high-school and attend university. She served as secretary of Ak’Tenamit’s board and always worked and studied with the goal of helping her family and community.

She used the knowledge and skills that she acquired through Ak’Tenamit to help her community better understand and defend their rights, especially around land rights issues, which are prominent there. Because of her training at Ak’Tenamit, she realized there was an injustice that plagued her community and rallied her friends and neighbors to stand up against a local landowner, who was allegedly involved in narco-trafficking. Catalina was a young, Mayan woman who had defied the odds and because of her knowledge and passion, she was targeted and murdered on February 14th as she returned from her first day at university.

After this tragic injustice, people worried that communities would be frightened away from voicing their anger and that Ak’Tenamit would eventually dissolve. The reaction, however, was just the opposite. Within the Ak’Tenamit community, Catalina is revered for her work. She is honored as someone that sought out and received an education, and used this to benefit those around her. Her work especially inspired female students, as many viewed her murder as evidence that they should continue studying and working to decrease resistance to female education and empowerment. In their undeterred eyes, if enough people stand up and demand change it becomes inevitable.

The success of Ak’Tenamit’s students and model demonstrates that solving Guatemala’s education problems is not just about increasing graduation rates. Ak’Tenamit’s students receive an education that does not just serve as a mechanism to boost national education stats but instead creates real opportunity for them. Providing real education requires increasing the quality and relevance of what students learn and giving students the practical skills and vocational training to take what they learn in the classroom and use it in impactful ways. Redressing the inequities that exist in Guatemala in a sustainable, lasting way will take efforts like this that bring together actors from many different fields, who are willing to take such a creative approach to educating rural, Mayan students. (Aparna is GSDM’s Special Correspondent for Global Educational Issues and can be reached at aparnaspatankar@gmail.com)

Yes, we used to be tolerant!

Just recently an extreme right-wing Finnish politician created a media uproar when he said in an interview that Finland immediately needs a law that rejects immigration and refugees are no longer welcomed. In his opinion, refugees are hanging around as criminals and as they are lazy, they should be sent to work in some dense Finnish forests. He also said that he doesn't want to hear a weird voice of Muslim prayer early in the morning.

Mr Teuvo Hekkarainen said it publicly, but there are a plenty of little Teuvo Hekkarainen all over Europe these days. If you analyze election results from any European country, you will see that populist, extreme right-wing political parties are gaining significant momentum. At a time when the world is suffering from bigger crises such as climate change and global financial crisis, the European election campaigns are unprecedentedly

focused on the question of immigration- whether they should continue accepting immigrants and how refugees eat-up their social benefits. Given that the West hosts just less than 20% of total refugees in the world, the prevalent fears are unfounded and sheer paranoiac.



There are not only discussions, but tough actions targeted against refugees and asylum seekers.

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“Cases of rampant deportation are more common than before and for some governments Iraq is a very safe place to live. Laws have been modified and made more inhumane. Hate groups are rife on the internet and people still get attacked on the streets just because they are different and they look different”

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Cases of rampant deportation are more common than before and for some governments Iraq is a very safe place to live. Laws have been modified and made more inhumane. Hate groups are rife on the internet and people still get attacked on the streets just because they are different and they look different.

The developing world hosts more than 80% of refugees in the world, but there too, it's not a safe haven for them. Refugees are exploited and used as scapegoats to fulfill political desires of a particular political cult. Many media reports demonstrate that resettlement schemes, too, are not free from corruption and blackmailing.


When the Hekkarainen case was at its peak, I had asked a Finnish friend of mine that whether Finland had historically been a tolerant nation. ‘Yes, we used to be tolerant! Even during the most difficult time, we were tolerant to outsiders’; she had replied.

And now once again the world needs to commit to a common statement and firmly say, ‘yes, we will be tolerant!’

(The Editor can be reached at manoj.bhusal@silcreation.org)



Seven-year-old Grace looks unhappy as she arrives at the Bahin refugee camp in Liberia. Her family left many relatives behind in Côte d'Ivoire when they fled. © UNHCR/G.Gordon



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