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Refugees: Refugee Assistance as  
Political Resources

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**African States and the Politics of Refugees: Refugee Assistance as Political Resources**

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*Introduction*

Mass influxes of refugees are widely held to be one more intractable problem for impoverished and conflict-ridden African countries -- "a luxury [the world's poorest states] .. can no longer afford" as a recent text put it (UNHCR 1998: 71). Refugees are seen to impose a variety of economic and environmental burdens on host countries, and to create or aggravate security threats. However, for the past twenty years, refugee flows have also been accompanied by a significant resource transfer in the form of international humanitarian assistance and human capital. Refugee camps have become the repositories of such resources as relief supplies and food aid, vehicles, communication equipment, and other locally valued and scarce materials. The refugees themselves bring human capital in the form of labor, skills and education. In addition, refugees are, if only for a brief burst of international media attention, a highly visible phenomenon, capable of focusing attention on regions normally lost to the public eye. They therefore represent political leverage for savvy actors in the region. Thus, a sustained injection of material, social and political 'refugee resources' is suddenly available in a receiving region.

In most African host countries, however, refugee hosting areas are poor and underdeveloped, and commonly experience increased security problems with a refugee influx. Security problems range from direct military attacks on camps to increased crime in hosting areas and political radicalism amongst refugees, but often, security problems derive from the new refugee resources. Like all resources, these are contested by political actors in the host country, and their distribution is not left exclusively to the relief agencies supposedly responsible for them. Undefended and resource-full refugee camps are frequently subject to the predatory behavior of armed elements in the region. Raids on refugee camps for relief supplies and equipment is a common occurrence, as is the military recruitment of young men into rebel militias or crime. In recent years, petty and organized crime have flourished in refugee camps, and several, notably in west Africa and the Congo, have become zones of drug smuggling, human trafficking, illegal logging, and gun running. Few camps are organized to address these problems. Camps often fall under the control of political or military elements, and civilian authority and sources of law and order are undermined. Crimes go unpunished because there is no adequate force to back up what rule of law does exist.. Most camps are not closed entities and so the problems of crime, violence and militarization leach out into the surrounding host community creating increased insecurity for the local population.

In this paper I want to explore some of the implications of this double impact of security problems and refugee resources for the relations between the host community and the state in Sub-Saharan Africa. The medium- and long-term consequences of this impact go beyond the economic and environmental burdens imposed by an initial mass influx. Refugee resources can potentially increase the welfare of host communities, augment state capacity, and even improve state accountability. All these are needed aspects of state building in Africa. However, in host countries characterized by security problems, this potential is threatened. The task for the international humanitarian community then becomes how to help states and civil society cope with the security problems associated with refugee resources.

My exploration of the impact of a refugee influx on state-civil society relations and state building is part of a growing body of recent research that seeks to understand the political consequences of refugees and humanitarian assistance for host countries (Landau 2001; Crisp 2000; Sperl 2000). These consequences go beyond the targeting of international aid by state and nonstate actors – a phenomenon that has been well documented in the literature on humanitarian assistance, ‘war economies’ and so forth (de Waal 1997; Slim 1998; Smock 1997; Weiss and Collins 1996). Many African countries have experienced the presence of large numbers of refugees for sustained periods, and the political consequences are only beginning to be examined.

Better understanding of the political impact of refugees for the state is important also for humanitarian reasons. In an increasingly restrictive asylum climate, where many receiving countries in the west seek to limit both the admission of refugees and the granting of asylum, the response of traditionally open and hospitable host countries in Africa is also changing. Now, more than ever before, African host governments are arguing that refugees present serious economic, environmental and security threats, and that they can no longer afford to keep their borders open or to allow refugees to remain for any length of time (UNHCR 1997). This position bodes poorly for present and future refugees. But host government concerns can be offset if the benefits of refugees can be demonstrated, and if states can be assisted in dealing with refugee-related security problems.

In the rest of the paper I first outline some criteria for state building in the African context, and then use these criteria to explore how refugee resources and security problems influence the socio-economic conditions of refugee-populated areas, state building and the relationship between the state and civil society. I explore the extent to which African host states can ‘capture’ refugee resources, and use them to bolster statehood.

### *African Statehood and State Building*

In African state theory an important analytical distinction is often made between the state, defined as government,<sup>1</sup> and the rulers of the country. African states are widely seen as ‘weak’ or ‘fragile’, lacking the elements of empirical statehood and ineffective in either advancing the welfare of their citizens, or managing society by providing peace and order, regulating territory and defending against external attack (Harbeson & Rothchild 2000; Clapham 1996; Mengisteab 1997).<sup>2</sup> A particular problem facing African states is their inability to control all of their territory. In many African countries, such as Sudan, Angola, and the Congo (DRC), insurgent movements control large swathes of territory and population (Deng 2000). Some have argued that many African states are dependent on the international system to maintain their ‘quasi’ statehood (Jackson 1990).

In Africa, state rulers have been conceptualized as ‘strongmen’: state power is concentrated in their hands, and they are ‘predatory’, self-serving and often ruthless towards their citizens in their quest to remain in power. Where leaders use the state excessively to accumulate power and enrich themselves, the end result is state collapse or near collapse (Ng’ethe 1995). ‘Collapsed’ or failed states are defined as “a situation where the structure, authority (legitimate power), law and political order have fallen apart and must be reconstituted in some form, old or new” (Zartman 1995: 1). States that spiral down to collapse are often helped along the way by leaders who are voraciously predatory, as in Somalia under Siad Barre, for example, or Zaire under Mobutu sese Seko. It is interesting to note that these leaders were adept at hijacking refugee resources and humanitarian assistance in general to further their own agendas (de Waal 1997, Boutroue 1998). Of the African states that have collapsed or come close to collapse during the 1990s, all are major producers of refugees (see Table 1). A more recent example

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, states are equated with governments, and defined as the set of coercive and administrative institutions which claims sovereign jurisdiction, i.e. the right to act as the ultimate authority, over a specific population and territory.

<sup>2</sup> “The question of whether all of the continent and its inhabitants actually belong to states, which once appear to have been settled beyond plausible dispute by colonial partition and independence, has been reopened by the evident disappearance of states from parts of the continent, and by the emergence in some of these of alternative authorities whose entitlement to statehood was contestable (Clapham 1996: 9).

might include Robert Mugabe's regime in Zimbabwe, which by the time of writing (December 2001) has sent thousands of refugees to neighboring countries, especially South Africa.

What is meant by a "strong" state? Three criteria for statehood are commonly agreed on (Clapham 1996: 8-11). First, a state must be capable of exercising sovereignty, or effective government over its people. This means a) that it is able to serve as a distributional and regulatory mechanism to ensure the welfare of its inhabitants; and b) that it is capable of exercising power over the people and territory it governs. In particular, this means that the state can control its borders both against external military threats and against unwanted population flows.

A second criterion concerns the legitimacy of the state, or the moral justification underpinning its right to exercise sovereignty. The state must be viewed as legitimate by both the inhabitants of its territory and by other states and external actors, in order to justify the claims it makes for control and obedience. There are two kinds of legitimacy. *Territorial* legitimacy concerns the right of the state to govern its territory. It is achieved either when most of the population voluntarily agrees to live within the state, (as a nation bound to the state), or because the state successfully asserts its right to govern a territory by virtue of historical occupation, or international agreements (Clapham 1996: 10). Governmental legitimacy concerns the right of state leaders to act on behalf of their citizens, and is achieved either by the citizens choosing their leaders in some constitutionally agreed manner, or as a result of a shared belief amongst the population that those in power derive their authority from God, or some other agreed source. Almost every state in the world must contend with groups who challenge the state's governmental legitimacy. These range from rightwing extremists in Montana to nationalist secessionists like Spain's Basques to powerful rebel insurgencies engaging in longstanding civil wars such as the Sudan People's Liberation Army.

A third criterion concerns the standing of the state in the international system, and the necessity that it be recognized by other states as a legally equal member of the system of states. This international recognition is essential in order for states to participate in the global economy, and to receive the ideological and material resources provided by other states. Some have argued that this recognition and status in the international system is more important to the state's prospects for survival than the first two measures (Clapham 1996: 15). One has only to consider the economic circumstances of countries like Iraq, Iran and Sudan to see what happens when this international approval is absent. The weaker the state in terms of its capacities and governmental legitimacy, the greater will be its need to call on this external recognition and support

These three criteria of ideal statehood are indicators of state strength, and can be used to define what we mean by state building. African states are the weakest in the international system, and rulers are constantly in search of resources, both within their own society and outside in the international system to bolster their sovereignty, their legitimacy and their international standing.<sup>3</sup>

A major theme in the African states literature explores how, in their efforts to survive and retain or increase their power, African leaders exploit the international environment by extracting resources like economic and military aid (Bayart 1993; Clapham 1996; Jackson 1990). Some argue that this process has changed in the post-Cold War period. African leaders are now less able to leverage resources flowing from Cold War necessities, and more constrained by 'conditionalities' imposed by international financial institutions, or by the funneling of aid directly to civil society actors like non-governmental organizations (NGOs), some of which are adversarial to the government (Clapham 1996; Weiss and Gordenker 1996). Nonetheless, although contested, international resources are still available, and the question is whether African leaders exploit them so as to serve their own personal purposes exclusively, or whether these resources also benefit the state building process in Africa.

The role of the state in humanitarian assistance is a controversial topic. Many argue that humanitarian assistance should be disengaged from corrupt and ineffective state institutions, that the state is and should be minimized and sidelined in the globalized, transnational social order, and that "we cause more harm than good by cooperating with

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<sup>3</sup> Jean-Francois Bayart's (1993) analysis of state politics in Africa explores how state leaders and other political actors manipulate political resources to further their own ends. Bayart argues that African states are no different from others in that all state rulers seek to enlarge or simply maintain their legitimacy and power over their territory and population and will target whatever resources are available, but their access to these resources must be negotiated with other interested actors.

evil power structures”.<sup>4</sup> Others argue that “The separation of aid from local institutions is ... a course of action that actively weakens government and local NGO services” (Christoplos 1998). Advocates of this latter position (including myself) argue that the state is needed in Africa, and should be actively incorporated into development and humanitarian relief efforts. This view has been complemented by a body of research on state building and reconstruction, with the main focus being the problem of how to transform the state into an effective organization capable of advancing social interests (Mengisteab 1997).

### *State Access to Refugee Resources*

In Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), the number of states having access to international refugee assistance is large. Of the 42 countries of SSA, 39 have hosted more than a thousand refugees at some time since 1990, and have therefore had some form of international refugee assistance available to them. However, in order for states to utilize refugee resources for their own political purposes, the influx, and consequent availability and flow of resources, would have to be large or sustained over a significant period. Not all host countries experienced such flows. As shown in Table 1, of the 39 SSA countries that experienced more than one thousand refugees between 1990-1997, 28 hosted more than 20,000 refugees.

Of the 39 host states, almost all experienced some form of conflict, ranging from ethnic or political tensions to rebel insurgencies or conflict with neighboring states. State building activities occur in peaceful states and in conflict-ridden states. The latter often utilize humanitarian resources and adjust their refugee policies to support their war efforts. In order to make a rough distinction between those states which were conflict-ridden and those which were not (or less so), I categorize states according to the numbers of displaced people (either refugees or internally displaced) they *produced* during this period. States that produced more than 10,000 displaced people are in the “conflict-ridden” category; those that produced less than 10,000 I define as “peaceful”.

Table 1 illustrates the breakdown of states according to the number of refugees they hosted between 1990-1997 and whether or not they were characterized by conflict. As shown, of the 39 SSA countries that experienced more than one thousand refugees, 28 hosted more than 20,000 refugees, of which 20 were conflict-ridden, and eight were peaceful. Of those states hosting less than 20,000 refugees but more than a thousand, five were conflict-ridden and six were peaceful.

Table 2 shows the period since 1997, and a slight redistribution of states, with fewer (24) hosting more than 20,000 refugees, and of those, fewer in conflict (15).

It would be useful to compare state building in conflict-ridden host states with peaceful ones, but this paper does not have the data to carry out such an analysis. Instead, using case material from mainly ‘peaceful’ host states, the rest of the paper explores the ways in which host states respond to the presence of refugee resources and refugee security threats, and how relations with civil society and state building activities are affected.

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<sup>4</sup> See Christoplos 1998 for an outline of this debate. The anti-state position in the literature on economic development argues that given the globalized world economy, and the predominance of liberal trade regimes, African societies would be better off with minimally involved states (for a review of this argument see Mengisteab 1997).

**Table 1**  
**Host States in Sub-Saharan Africa, 1990-1997**

\* signifies collapsed or near-collapsed state

States that hosted >20,000 refugees (N=28)		States that hosted <20,000 refugees (but >1,000) (N=11)		
Conflict-ridden states (Host states that experienced conflict and produced +10,000 refugees/IDPs) N=20		Peaceful States (Host states that did not produce +10,000 refugees/IDPs) N=8	Conflict-ridden states (Host states that experienced conflict and produced +10,000 refugees/IDPs) N=5	Peaceful States (Host states that did not produce +10,000 refugees/IDPs) N=6
Burundi	Rwanda*	Cameroon	Angola*	Benin
Congo-Brazza	Congo-Zaire*	Cote d'Ivoire	Chad	Burkina Faso
Cntrl Afr Rep.	Sudan	Guinea	Eritrea	Gabon
Djibouti	Ethiopia	Malawi	Nigeria	Gambia
Uganda	Kenya	Swaziland	Niger	Guinea-Bissau
Mozambique*	Somalia*	Tanzania		Namibia
South Africa	Liberia*	Zambia		
Togo	Ghana	Zimbabwe		
Mali	Senegal			
Sierra Leone*	Mauritania			

**Table 2**  
**Host States in Sub-Saharan Africa, 1997-2001**

States that hosted >20,000 refugees (N=24)		States that hosted <20,000 refugees (but >1,000) (N=15)		
Conflict-ridden states (Host states that experienced conflict and produced +10,000 refugees/IDPs) N=15		Peaceful States (Host states that did not produce +10,000 refugees/IDPs) N=9	Conflict-ridden states (Host states that experienced conflict and produced +10,000 refugees/IDPs) N=7	Peaceful States (Host states that did not produce +10,000 refugees/IDPs) N=8
Burundi	Rwanda*	Cameroon	Angola*	Benin
Congo-Brazza	Congo (DRC)*	Cote d'Ivoire	Chad	Burkina Faso
Cntrl Afr Rep.	Sudan	Djibouti	Eritrea	Gabon
Ethiopia	Somalia*	Guinea	Guinea-Bissau	Gambia
Uganda	Kenya	Malawi	Nigeria	Mali
Ghana	Senegal	Mozambique	Niger	Namibia
Liberia*	Sierra Leone*	Tanzania	Zimbabwe	South Africa
Mauritania		Togo		Swaziland
		Zambia		

Source: *UNHCR Statistical Overview,*  
*World Refugee Survey 1996 - 2000*

## *Refugee Resources, Security Threats and State Building*

Three measures of state building were identified above. *Empirical statehood*, refers to the state's effectiveness both to provide for the welfare of its citizens and to regulate and control its territory; *legitimacy* refers to how citizens perceive the validity of their government; and *international recognition* is necessary for effective functioning in the global system. In trying to assess how refugee resources and security problems influence the first measure, empirical statehood, it is necessary to separate their impact on the host population itself from that on the state. The next section explores these effects in more detail.

### *Increased welfare for the host population?*

It is often argued that refugees diminish the welfare of the receiving region by imposing economic and environmental hardships that outweigh any benefits derived from the refugees' presence. Host governments frequently complain that refugees outside camps compete with locals for scarce resources such as land, jobs and environmental resources (e.g. water, rangeland or firewood), and burden existing infrastructure such as schools, housing and health facilities. These concerns underpin the state's rationale for keeping refugees in camps.

On the other hand, it can be argued that the welfare of the host country, particularly the host community, is increased by the presence of refugees, whether they are in camps or assisted settlements, or 'self-settled' i.e. living amongst the host community. Resources from international assistance to camps 'trickle out' into the community, and the economic activities of refugees, including labor, trade, and agriculture, contribute to development and increase the standard of living. The evidence for either of these arguments is inconclusive because efforts to measure the economic impact of refugees are notoriously difficult, and research results are mixed,<sup>5</sup> but the evidence can be summarized as follows.

First, although international refugee assistance<sup>6</sup> is usually intended for refugees in camps, it finds its way into the host community. Aid agencies deliberately make aid available to local people as a way to increase the receptiveness of the local community to refugees and prevent locals from becoming resentful of refugees. In addition, and with greater consequences for the long term, new or improved transportation infrastructure (roads, bridges), health clinics and schools, are created to assist aid distribution, and these also benefit local people. In some refugee receiving areas, the government appears to have assigned many development activities to the UNHCR. As in many other host countries, western Tanzania has seen numerous development activities, including the creation of new infrastructure like roads, carried out under the auspices of relief assistance (Landau 2001).<sup>7</sup>

Relief agencies often earmark humanitarian assistance to offset the negative impact of refugees on host communities. This is especially true for environmental problems. In the initial stages of their arrival, refugees have

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<sup>5</sup> For a review of this literature see Jacobsen 2001; some case studies include Bakewell 2000; Bascom 1998; Black 1994; Callamard 1994; Hansen 1990.

<sup>6</sup> International humanitarian assistance is of two main types: food aid and non-food aid which includes material and personnel resources intended to provide for the medical, shelter, security, educational and repatriation/resettlement needs of refugees. Refugee assistance is provided in three different ways: on a bilateral (intergovernmental) basis; through international organizations (primarily UNHCR); and by nongovernmental organizations. Most assistance is channeled through UNHCR which makes arrangements with the host government and with implementing NGOs to provide for the refugees. Assistance is provided in the form of in-kind contributions (food, medicine, tools, logistical personnel, aircraft etc), or through funds made available to purchase goods and services.

<sup>7</sup> In Tanzania, the author was present in June 1999, when the government and UNHCR were negotiating about the location for a new camp for Congolese refugees. The government argued for the camp to be constructed some miles south of Kigoma. Access to the new camp would have required that the road along the lake be upgraded and a bridge across a river be built. The road and bridge would have benefited the state because it is a primary trucking link between northwestern Tanzania and Zambia. UNHCR refused the location and one closer to existing Congolese camps was chosen. However the example illustrates the way in which host governments see relief organizations like UNHCR as potential sources of development for refugee receiving regions.

to rely more heavily on 'free' natural resources either to support themselves (construct housing or collect food and firewood) or to make a living. Economic activities like charcoal making, firewood and thatch grass selling, and the cultivation of hillsides lead to deforestation and destruction of plant cover, and the overburdening of water supplies and rangeland. Local people resent this use of "their" resources, and in recent years relief agencies have sought to offset these burdens. For example, in 1998, UNHCR took early protective measures in Tanzania's Kigoma region to prevent the kind of environmental degradation that occurred in Kagera when the Rwandan influx occurred in 1994. Provisions were made for environmental programs, for security problems, and for other types of burdens imposed by refugees on local communities, such as road and other infrastructural repair, supplemental health clinics and schools for local people, and so on. UNHCR has implemented environmental programs in many countries.

Refugee camps can serve as places of assistance for local people in times of economic duress such as drought. For example, during the 1990s drought in eastern Ethiopia, a substantial number of the locals managed to get registered as refugees and benefited from the relief distribution. Furthermore, in many host countries, the benefits of refugee assistance persist after refugees repatriate. Resources such as buildings and transportation equipment are turned over to the local community. After the Mozambican repatriation from Malawi was completed in 1995, UNHCR handed over refugee facilities including schools, clinics and vehicles worth \$35 million to the Malawian government, which also requested \$78 million from UNHCR for reforestation to offset the deforestation resulting from the refugee presence (*World Refugee Survey* 1996: 57).

A second way in which refugees contribute to their host society is by the economic resources they bring. Refugees have a multiplier effect, by expanding the capacity and productivity of the receiving area's economy through trade and the growth of markets. Refugees bring material wealth from their home countries, ranging from gold to trucks and computers. New markets spring up around refugee camps, and a multitude of goods, including illicit ones, can be found that were unattainable in the region before. As is well known, aid resources are fungible and both food and non-food aid items are traded in local markets and further afield.<sup>8</sup> Self-settled refugees provide economic inputs for the receiving community, both at the local level when they first arrive, and over time, as refugees move deeper into the host country, and into the cities. When they are permitted to participate in the local economy, refugees contribute their human capital, in the form of education, new technologies and skills, or needed labor. Some host countries have benefited economically from refugees as a result of agricultural expansion or intensification made possible by refugee labor, as occurred in eastern Sudan (Kok 1989) or new farming practices. Local farmers can benefit when there is increased demand by refugees for local food (as opposed to unfamiliar and unwanted food aid). Trade (or barter) of food aid for local produce is common.

The effects of these economic changes on the welfare of host communities will vary for different groups (Bascom 1998; Chambers 1986). But where local groups might benefit, as for example from increased demand for local farm produce, security problems in the hosting area can create significant obstacles. In recent years, African host countries have seen a trend towards increased incursions by militant groups from refugee sending countries. Armed incursions are usually accompanied by rape, looting, abductions, cattle theft and loss of lives (*World Refugee Survey* 2001). This insecurity affects people's willingness to leave the relative safety of their villages to farm new lands, gather firewood, tend their cattle, or otherwise attend to their livelihoods. Insecurity reduces the economic vitality of the community and offsets any economic advantages that might accrue from refugee resources. The state's capacity to maximize the benefits of refugee resources and reduce security problems is key indicator of its strength. How the state's response is perceived by its citizens will also affect its legitimacy. In order to leverage increased legitimacy from refugee resources, the host state must avoid being sidelined by international relief agencies and be seen to be actively involved in bringing benefits to its citizens. Whether this occurs depends in part on the relief agency, and the extent to which it works with and through the state. Many NGOs avoid working with what they perceive to be corrupt and ineffective state agencies, and seek to channel assistance directly to meet 'grassroots' needs. In some cases, donors and intergovernmental organizations like the World Bank use NGOs as an explicit means of bypassing the state (Weiss & Gordenker 1996). Other organizations, particularly international ones like UNDP and UNHCR, which are obliged by their mandates to work with host states, channel assistance

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<sup>8</sup> It is common to see the World Food Program's sacks of maize and soya oil as well as UNHCR's familiar blue tarpaulins for sale in local markets. Less research has been done on the regional trading networks that are formed from food aid after it is trucked out of camps and local markets and transported to wholesale markets in towns in the region (Landau 2001).



through state agencies and government budgets, and this enables the state to associate itself with any benefits deriving from refugees.<sup>9</sup>

### *Increased state capacity?*

The presence of longstanding refugee populations (or “protracted situations”) can increase state capacity in two ways. First, since the state is obliged to respond to the coordination and management demands of the refugees, aid agencies and aid inflows, it must augment its bureaucracy, either by boosting the capacity of existing line ministries, or adding entire new refugee departments or programs. In many host countries, the Commissioners of refugee bureaucracies are fairly senior, some reporting directly to the President.

Second, state capacity can be increased through the manipulation of political relations between the state and international agencies. In order to encourage the host government to host refugees, international agencies must show responsiveness to the government’s concerns about the burdens, including security, refugees impose. This responsiveness can take the form of offers of development assistance in the form of refugee assistance. Landau (2001) makes this point compellingly in his description of the SPRAA (Special Program for Refugee Affected Areas) in Tanzania, a program supported by donor assistance to mitigate the effects of the refugee presence, and operating from the Prime Minister’s Office:

.. the SPRAA represents .. a kind of wish list including all the development projects that the administration could not afford on its own.. it represents a large elite (governmental and donor) initiated program designating large tracts of land in Kigoma and Kagera for special assistance. Included among the more conventional small-scale village projects, there are calls for stricter environmental regulation and expanding the capacity of the local administration. ... SPRAA [represents] a conscious attempt on the part of sympathetic donors and the Tanzanian government to create a new way of viewing the long-standing and recently emerging development challenges facing the refugee-populated areas.

Refugee amelioration programs underwritten by aid agencies can offer new state capacity building opportunities for host governments, many of which have acted accordingly. Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopia and Kenya have all enlarged or added to their state and security bureaucracies through donor-assisted refugee programs.

### *Increased control?*

A second criterion for empirical or effective statehood is the ability and capacity of the state to regulate and control its territory and to defend against external attack. In this regard, refugee movements pose two potential threats to the state: the (uncontrolled) crossing of the border, and their activities once they are in the host country. At first blush, a mass influx of refugees suggests a violation of state sovereignty and the inability of states to control their borders. However, this violation only occurs if the state is seen to attempt to control its border and *fail*. In most cases, African states have *not* attempted to keep refugees out. Those which have sought to do so, by using armed force, usually succeed -- as did Tanzania during much of 1995-96, when it periodically closed its border to prevent new refugee surges from Burundi, and South Africa when it closed its borders against Mozambican refugees during the 1980s. Rather, states control the pace of the influx by opening and closing their borders, and they control the location of refugees once they have entered, by moving them into camps and ensuring that they stay there. In recent years, Tanzania, Guinea, Zambia and other host states have used their armies to round up refugees and move them into camps.

A refugee influx need not be seen as a loss of control over borders and territory, but rather as a manifestation of state power and responsibility, especially when the army is deployed to back up state demands. In some cases, the state has parleyed a refugee influx into a political victory: the state can claim to be generous and hospitable by

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<sup>9</sup> It is difficult to find exact figures for the humanitarian aid disbursements that host states have received, but as an approximation, the figures from UNHCR’s Global Appeal for 1998 are illustrative. According to UNHCR’s budget in Sub-Saharan Africa, General Programmes were budgeted for \$147.3 million, and seven Special Programmes required a total of \$312.2 million (UNHCR 1998 Global Appeal).

admitting refugees, yet demonstrate control of its territory by monitoring and controlling them, often with the use of the army. The decision of host states to admit refugees then can be seen as a positive act of territory control, and a demonstration of state strength, both of which contribute to increased legitimacy.

A more significant threat to the state's claim of control comes from security problems arising from refugees once they are settled in the territory. In addition to the threats to the host community discussed earlier, refugees create national security problems by importing the conflict from their homelands. In the past year (2001) alone, direct attacks or armed incursions of some kind from either rebel or government forces or both have occurred in Guinea (from Sierra Leone), Zambia (from Angola), Tanzania (from Burundi), and Uganda (from Sudan) to name only some. The separation of refugees from combatants is a notoriously difficult task, and the failure to do so means that rebel forces often live among refugees. Military recruitment is a common problem both in and outside of refugee camps. In some cases, the political control of entire camps has been taken over by militias, as occurred most famously in the Rwandan camps in Goma, but also in western Kenya (Kakuma camp), and by the Polisario in Mauritania and Algeria.

The nature and intensity of security problems stemming from refugees is clearly a threat to host states and undermines state building by decreasing the welfare of the population and the legitimacy of the government. Although there is frequent talk in international circles of new international mechanisms to address refugee security problems (Jacobsen 1999), none have materialized and it is the host state itself which must deal with these problems.

However, while host states complain of security threats presented by refugees, it is not always apparent that all these states want to clear their receiving areas of militant or rebel activities. Much depends on the political relationship between the host state and the sending country. The Tanzanian government's position on Rwandan and Burundian refugees is illustrative. In 1996, the government forced back Rwandan refugees after they were suspected of pursuing their political and military objectives from exile in the camps (Rutinawa 1999), but in the late 1990s, the Tanzanian state has not acted this way towards the Burundians in their western region. It is widely suspected that the Tanzanian government is unwilling, not unable, to separate and screen out political and military elements from the Burundian refugees in the camps. Nor does the government seem willing to adequately police the Burundian camps and settlements to prevent political and military activities from taking place. This failure of action has led the Burundian government to accuse Tanzania of allowing the rebels to operate from its territory, a charge the Tanzanians have denied.

Political considerations of this sort do not prevent host states from boosting their security capacity by negotiating significant security packages with international refugee agencies. UNHCR has provided equipment and training for police forces in a number of host countries. For example, in 1995 Tanzania negotiated a security package with UNHCR worth about one million dollars, in which the government received equipment and training for its police to patrol the camps and surrounding areas. Kenya has also benefited from police training for the Dadaab refugee camps.

In host countries where the government has lost control of areas to rebel forces, the security problems created or aggravated by refugees do threaten the state. But not all security problems posed by refugees represent a loss of control by the government. Host governments use refugees and international assistance to offset their security problems in other ways too. In Uganda, the government has been confronting rebel insurgencies in the north throughout the 1990s. Oxfam reports that the government's policies concerning the Sudanese refugees were "constantly shifting in response to the changing international security situation." This led them first to reject Oxfam's proposal to move the refugees away from the border with Sudan, then to change their minds and pressure the relief agencies and UNHCR to move the refugees into the settlement at Ikafe (Payne 1996: 117).

Security problems negate or diminish the benefits of refugee resources enjoyed by the host community and are a major factor in changing host attitudes. An initial welcoming response to refugees can evolve into resentment and threats against them if the community perceives the refugees to be causing more problems than benefits. In a number of countries, host governments have changed their policy from allowing self-settlement (or at least turning a blind eye) to forcing refugees into camps. This change is linked to increased security problems, but in some cases it is also because the government or local authorities seek to sustain or augment their legitimacy by adapting refugee

policies to be more in keeping with the host population's unwillingness to allow the refugees to continue living amongst them.<sup>10</sup>

### *International recognition*

By admitting refugees and treating them in line with international standards of refugee protection and assistance, host states act in accordance with the international conventions most have signed<sup>11</sup> and thereby act as good international citizens --winning the approval of the international system. Appropriate refugee policies place the host state in line with international obligations and human rights agreements, and relieve other states of the burden of dealing with refugees. In return, the host state wins the approval of the international community, and its standing in that community is enhanced.

But when states act inappropriately towards refugees do these actions draw the disapproval of the international system, and what form does this disapproval take? The international community, represented by UNHCR, would like host states to adopt specific practices relating to the protection and assistance of refugees (Nicholson and Twomey 1999; UNHCR 1997). The offer of full asylum and socio-economic and legal integration into the host state is strongly encouraged but rarely accomplished. Short of that, host states are deemed at least to be responsible for refugees' physical safety, especially when they are required to live in camps. This task represents one of the main failures of host states to abide by international standards of refugee treatment. If refugees are required to reside in camps, these should be maintained as civilian and humanitarian entities, i.e. combatants must be excluded and camps not be used for military purposes. But ensuring the civilian nature of camps is difficult, even where states are willing, and there are many instances where combatants use the camps freely. The most egregious and well known case was the Goma camps of eastern Zaire in 1994-96, where Rwandan genocidaires mobilized to attack Rwanda again. But less well known examples abound. Tanzania's failure to ensure the civilian nature of the Burundian refugee settlements has somewhat tarnished its traditional reputation as a host country that abided by international refugee agreements, but little has happened to bring Tanzania to task.<sup>12</sup> In Guinea, Uganda, Kenya, South Africa, and elsewhere, refugees either in camps or in cities have been subject to attacks and other forms of physical abuse both from external forces and from antagonistic elements inside the host country. In many cases the host government has done little to stop these abuses, and in some cases the authorities themselves have been responsible.

There are few international consequences for states that fail to protect refugees. Other than protests to the government, there is little that the international community, represented by UNHCR, has done when host countries are abusive towards refugees, or when they permit militancy among the refugees. It is frequently argued that strong international censure accomplishes little, and could incline the host state to refuse to accept any refugees. There are no documented instances where inflows of foreign aid or humanitarian assistance were affected by a host state's policies towards refugees on its territory. This suggests that as long as a host state allows refugees to cross its borders, no matter how inadequate the protection it offers, the host state stands only to gain but never to lose international approval. This is a problem for the refugees and the international agencies representing them, but not for the host state.

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<sup>10</sup> Whether the host government responds quickly to the dissatisfaction of its citizens depends on its political relationship with those citizens. Local authorities are more likely to be responsive to the host community than is the central government, particularly if the refugee hosting area is in a distant or politically unimportant region.

<sup>11</sup> Most countries have signed the key international refugee agreements. By 2001, 134 countries had signed either the 1951 Convention or the 1967 Protocol. Of the 53 African countries, 49 had signed and ratified these agreements and 45 had signed the 1969 OAU Convention, which extends the definition of refugees (UNHCR 2000).

<sup>12</sup> Burundi has accused Tanzania of assisting the rebel forces, and relations between the two states have deteriorated in the late 1990s to what Rutinwa calls their "lowest moments" culminating in 1997 with serious sabre-rattling between the two countries and a few military confrontations in 1997 (Rutinwa 1999).

*Conclusion: Tapping Refugees' Potential Through Host Government Policies*

The empirical record is mixed, but there can be no doubt that, even in the face of security threats, the resources embodied in refugees represent all kinds of potential – both for legitimate state building, and for the purposes of leaders' personal enrichment or empowerment. Host states mobilize this potential through their refugee policies which can be designed to maximize the state's access to refugee resources. For example, the ways in which refugees are settled and distributed in the host country is likely to affect the utilization of refugee resources. Requiring that refugees live in camps ensures that international assistance is concentrated and more easily accessible. On the other hand, restricting refugees to camps prevents their utilization as productive economic actors. If refugees are permitted to be self-settled, their individual resources and skills will be available to the host community, but this may not be a politically acceptable choice for governments when there are security problems in the region. The choices made by the host government about how it responds to refugees must be weighed with many factors in mind, perhaps security weighing most heavily. Nevertheless, host governments, especially those with protracted refugee situations on their hands, would do well to see refugees and the resources that accompany them as a potential asset for state building. Some host governments have recognized the need to approach protracted refugee situation in new ways, and their national interests in doing so. In a recent joint report by the Government of Uganda and UNHCR, the Ugandan government recognized that there was diminished donor interest in funding protracted refugee assistance program, and that by making refugees self-reliant, they would cost less in food and other support services (UNHCR Uganda 1999). That this program of self-reliance has progressed even in the context of national security problems in Uganda also makes it a good model for other host countries.

By embracing refugees and treating them as a potential asset, host governments could find that they are less of a burden than widely perceived. By pursuing integration programs aimed at creating communities that accommodate locals and nationals, host governments could place themselves on the agendas of development organizations such as the World Bank and UNDP as well as bilateral donors. Integrated refugee-national programs could be considered part of the agendas of development organizations such as the World Bank and UNDP as well as bilateral donors. Embracing refugees would give refugees the rights that should go with the resources they bring, and would earn host governments the kudos of human rights organizations, and thereby international public opinion. Finally, a policy that sought to incorporate longstanding refugees into the host society would increase the human security of everyone living there, and this is surely the greatest asset of all.

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