



Viewpoint

# Refuge in the City

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**Abstract:** This paper highlights the changing nature of refugee displacement and the resultant challenges in addressing the needs of refugees in urban areas. It reflects on the failures of traditional models in delivering needed services in these complex environments. It argues that current humanitarian program models are outdated, expensive, and ill-equipped for an effective response in urban areas. The article goes on to propose a myriad of new and emerging models and approaches that could increase efficiencies and enhance sustainability in humanitarian response.

**Keywords:** urban refugees; humanitarian response; displacement; area-based approach; cash assistance; gender equality; self-reliance

## 1. Introduction

Refugees increasingly reside in urban areas, which creates both challenges and opportunities. This paper looks at why refugees gravitate to the city and why humanitarians, donors, and practitioners alike need to completely rethink service provision modalities for urban refugees. This rethink necessitates new models and approaches including: creating an enabling policy environment, implementing an area-based approach, using cash transfers to maximal benefit, and harnessing the economic power of women. Effectively applying these models requires new actors and nontraditional partners as well as new approaches to funding. The paper concludes with the overarching humanitarian objectives of promoting resilience and restoring dignity which it claims are best achieved through facilitating urban refugee self-reliance.

The premises outlined in this thought piece reflect and synthesize learning from more than 10 years of research and assessments on refugee livelihoods including in urban areas, extensive literature reviews, consultations with a myriad of experts, and findings gleaned from numerous conferences and workshops.

## 2. The Lure of the City

Refugees, like many of us, move to cities for the services, the opportunities, and the infrastructure that cities provide (Muggah and Adriana 2018). Dynamic and growing markets translate into more and better economic opportunities; well-developed health and educational services result in improved care as well as quality academic instruction. Transportation networks, technology, financial services, and housing stock can lead to better access, connectivity, and improved shelter and living conditions. Cities tend to be hubs of talent and wealth which serve to attract ever more talent which, in turn, leads to ever higher concentrations of wealth and opportunity than in rural and less-developed areas.

Refugees who migrate to urban areas tend, on the whole, to be more highly educated and more resourceful. In Kampala, for example, a study found that most of the refugees are educated urbanites—70 percent of the sample interviewed had either finished or been attending secondary education prior to flight and 30 percent had a college or university qualification. Many were academics, researchers, engineers, teachers, and musicians (Macchiavello 2004). Self-selection not only brings the

most educated but also often brings the most entrepreneurial to the cities (Sommers 1999); that is, the refugees who not only seek out the opportunities urban areas provide but who also have the skill set and business savvy to take advantage of those opportunities.

According to a McKinsey report, expanding populations are not the main drivers of urban growth. The major factor is rising per capita GDP, fueled by the agglomeration of benefits in larger cities and their capacity to attract higher investments and talented workers. Today, in fact, only 600 urban centers generate about 60 percent of global GDP (McKinsey Global Institute 2011). It is access to these benefits that refugees migrating to urban areas seek. The irony, of course, is that many of the services and benefits refugees seek to access in cities are beyond their reach due to restrictive host government policies. A 2014 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) report of 214 countries reviewed, for example, found that only 37 percent met the international standards on refugees' right to work and had the necessary legislation enacted and enforced and ensured that work permits were issued (UNHCR 2014a).

A further complicating factor, which undoubtedly impacts the restrictive policies, is the fact that 86 percent of all refugees are hosted by developing countries and 42 percent reside in countries whose GDP per capita is below \$5000 (UNHCR 2014b). Such countries are ill-equipped to receive the refugees and are, more often than not, unable to keep pace with their own urban planning and development needs. As such, refugees are not only often fleeing from impoverished nations, they are also largely fleeing 'into' poverty. In these cities, refugees eke out a means of survival alongside the host community urban poor in neighborhoods plagued by high levels of unemployment, crime, substandard shelter, and often limited basic services—potable water, sanitation, garbage collection, and public transportation (Women's Refugee Commission 2011a). As a result, most refugees have to make trade-offs between competing priorities to meet even their most basic of needs, such as rent, food, living expenses, healthcare, and education (Barbelet and Wake 2017).

Refugees are believed to contribute to rising crime rates and the overburdening of public services while competing for scarce jobs (Jacobsen and Fratzke 2016; Muggah 2018). In Lebanon, the large number of Syrian refugees, as a case in point, have spurred inflation, especially in the housing market where upward pressure on rents has increased prices enormously due to the lack of housing supply (International Labor Organization (ILO 2014)). It has also resulted in depressed wages as Syrians are willing to work for less than Lebanese nationals. According to a 2014 Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) report, the massive influx of Syrian refugees is expected to further increase labor supply by between 30 and 50 percent and to drive down agricultural wages substantially. In some villages of the Bekaa Valley, the daily wages of laborers have dropped by up to 60 percent. Syrian nonskilled laborers are gradually replacing the skilled Lebanese labor force (FAO 2014). The International Labor Organization (ILO) reports that in Lebanon, government expenditures have been rising in order to meet the increasing demand for public services, including education, health, electricity, water supply, solid waste management, and transportation. Meanwhile, revenues have decreased due to disturbed trade activity, lower economic activity, and a loss in consumer confidence (ILO 2014).

While the influx and hosting of refugees can have severe consequences for affected States, the presence of refugees can also result in benefits. These benefits can be accrued through both donor funding support and its wider impacts on local economies and via the refugees themselves—their economic activity and purchasing power. For example, an estimated \$800 million (1230 billion LBP) was given in humanitarian aid to Lebanon during 2014 and the additional demand created an increased supply equivalent of 2068 billion LBP, partially met by increased local production. This reflected an additional growth of 1.3 percent in the Lebanese GDP (UNHCR and UNDP 2015). This growth partially offset the economic decline resulting from lost tourism and the loss of one of Lebanon's major trade routes and trade partners (Syria) (UNHCR and UNDP 2015). So, while refugees can cause a suppression of wages and a burdening of already stretched services and inadequate infrastructure,

the influx of donor dollars does trickle down through the local economy, with refugees purchasing food and renting apartments, which has economic benefits for the host community.

Refugees also contribute directly to local markets and economies. A study by the University of Oxford Refugee Studies Centre on refugees in Uganda found that 99 percent were economically active, that 21 percent of those in Kampala have businesses that employ others, and that 40 percent of those they employ are Ugandan nationals (Betts et al. 2014). The research found that refugees were both employment creators as well as providers of human capital. The arrival of Syrian refugees' private capital and expertise, for example, is reported to have accelerated business growth in the hosting countries of Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon (Schillings 2018). In another example, nearly 6000 formal businesses were established by Syrian refugees residing in Turkey by 2017 and when informal businesses are included, this number is closer to 20,000 business (Del Carpio et al. 2018). Further, in addition to providing human capital and creating services and products, refugees in urban areas are important consumers of local goods and services. Recognizing these contributions, organizations such as UNHCR and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) now promote access to labor markets and the right to work as core elements of development-oriented, sustainable refugee programming (Zetter and Ruaudel 2018). Contrarily, restrictive work rights encourage informal economic activities and deprive host countries of an economically active population who could otherwise contribute to the tax base and participate more formally in the economy as consumers and producers (Ayoubi and Saavedra 2018).

### 3. They're Here and They're Staying

Regardless of host government and encampment policies, refugees have found and continue to find their way into the cities. Currently, nearly 60 percent of all refugees reside in cities (UNHCR 2014b) and this will continue as increasingly refugee camps are seen as an option of last resort. UNHCR's Policy on Alternatives to Camps promotes avoiding the establishment of camps, whenever possible, and phasing out existing refugee camps, when feasible (UNHCR 2014c). Camps have, one could argue, worked better for the humanitarians providing services than for the refugees receiving them. Refugees in camps are easily counted, making food distributions, toilet construction, tent or shelter dispersal a simple matter of logistics—logistics that come at a high cost, however, to refugees' dignity, self-reliance, and futures.

Securing host government support for alternatives to camps, however, requires well-thought-out advocacy strategies that focus on promoting a more enabling environment—environments where the legal, policy, and administrative framework of the host country provide refugees with freedom of movement and residence, permission to work and access to basic services and social 'safety nets' as members of the communities where they are living (UNHCR 2014c). It also requires achieving synergies with national development planning in order to achieve efficiencies and lasting impact for refugees and host communities, in such areas as education, healthcare, nutrition, water, sanitation, housing, energy, and employment (UNHCR 2014c). Making this approach palatable to hosting governments necessitates ensuring that there are both direct and derivative benefits to host country nationals. When their own citizens benefit through improved services and aid is used to promote lasting improvements to host country infrastructure, affected States are likely to be more receptive to recognizing and respecting the full range of refugee rights endorsed in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.<sup>1</sup> Implementation of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), for example, which brings development and private-sector actors and resources to the refugee response, is leading to policy change and a more enabling environment in CRRF<sup>2</sup> countries like Ethiopia, which

<sup>1</sup> 1951 Convention available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.html>.

<sup>2</sup> The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework is the vision adopted by the UN General Assembly in the New York Declaration in September 2016. It aims for a more comprehensive, predictable response to refugee crises built on the pillars of: easing pressure on countries that welcome and host refugees; building refugee self-reliance; expanding access

traditionally took a much more restrictive approach to refugees freedom of movement and right to work (Abebe 2018).

While host governments fear that allowing urban refugees to work will promote de facto local integration, the counter argument is that not allowing them to work promotes criminality and results in lost tax revenue. Refugees in urban areas are going to find ways to survive, whether through the formal or informal market, whether legally or illegally. Without the right to work, refugees resort to harmful, negative economic coping strategies that put themselves and their families at risk. Families pull children out of school when money is scarce, reduce food intake to one meal a day, and engage in begging and transactional sex in order to meet their basic survival needs (Buscher 2011). Surely it is better to regulate their economic activities and bring them into the formal economy, when possible, thus allowing their earnings to contribute to the tax base. This requires a mind shift from viewing refugees as burdens to seeing refugees as assets.

Host governments' policy and practice, however, seldom view refugees as potential assets who can contribute to economic stimulation and growth—filling both skilled and unskilled labor shortages. Where policies do recognize refugees' legal right to work, practice often results in exclusion and harassment (Women's Refugee Commission 2011b). Generally relegated to the informal economy, refugees suffer discrimination, underemployment, the withholding of wages, and exploitation—abuses that without the right to legally work, they have little recourse through the legal system.

Refugees are already in the cities in the tens and hundreds of thousands—in Nairobi, in Delhi, in Johannesburg, in Kampala, in Quito, in Cairo, and many dozens more. In addition, they are increasingly in protracted situations—unable to go home and with little likelihood of resettlement. Forty-five percent of all refugee situations are now protracted<sup>3</sup> with the majority of those situations lasting 20 to 30 or more years (UNHCR 2014b). The fact that refugees are already there and that they are likely staying for a decade or a generation—humanitarian and development actors, donor governments, multilaterals, and host governments need to change their perceptions, their policies and their practices to confront this reality (UNHCR 2018a). This requires that all relevant stakeholders ensure that legislation and resources work for the betterment of everyone in the cities—citizens and refugees alike.

#### 4. Change Everything

In order to effectively serve and protect refugees in urban areas and provide sustainable benefits to hosting communities, engaged actors from donors to humanitarian practitioners need to change their modalities of working. The lessons and good practices generated from working with refugees in camps are no longer applicable. The establishment of parallel NGO services—health clinics and vocation training programs—are neither effective nor efficient responses.

Humanitarians can no longer continue to treat every new crisis as a short-term emergency. Instead, those responding should start with the assumption that the displacement is likely going to be for a decade or a generation, thereby necessitating a dramatic shift in planning and programming—from the start. Emergency response often starts on the wrong foot—only planning for the short-term, doing what we already know, and applying models used in different parts of the world that may not be culturally or contextually appropriate—all of which undermines longer-term efforts and effective planning. Urban response requires a complete rethink of traditional humanitarian models which likely

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to resettlement to third countries and other complementary pathways; and fostering conditions that enable refugees to voluntarily return to their countries of origin. Countries that agree to pilot these approaches are termed 'CRRF rollout countries' and include: Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Honduras, Panama, Afghanistan, Chad, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zambia.

<sup>3</sup> UNHCR defines a protracted refugee situation as one in which 25,000 or more refugees from the same nationality have been in exile for five years or more in a given asylum country.

means that different skill sets are needed and different responses, both of which may mean hiring and deploying a different kind of staff.

## 5. New Models

### 5.1. Enabling Environment

Creating economic and educational opportunities for refugees in urban areas is a challenging, complex undertaking. Advocating for and influencing host government policy for recognition of refugee rights in policy and practice is a requisite first step. Government restrictions on refugees' right to work, on recognition of refugee certificates and diplomas, and on securing residence permits represent the biggest challenge to refugee self-reliance and refugee protection in urban areas (Buscher 2011). In many urban areas, access to basic services is frequently impeded by government policies that restrict health and education services to their own country nationals. Such restrictions impact access to opportunity but also heighten vulnerability. Jacobsen states that the vulnerabilities refugees are exposed to are predominantly "determined by the laws and policies of host governments and by the way these policies are implemented; the public and private institutions devoted to supporting and managing refugees, and the public ethos towards refugees" (Jacobsen 2006). Further, the legal framework and the state and nonstate actors that interact with refugees in any given country strongly affect how refugee policy is not only developed but also interpreted and enacted (Barbelet and Wake 2017). Gaining host government support for creating an enabling policy environment can be enhanced by changing how humanitarians work, what humanitarians do, and what donors fund. Ensuring benefit to host communities and promoting sustainable change can make hosting refugees less of a burden and more of an opportunity. Such needed changes are delineated below.

### 5.2. Focus on Where, Not Who

Urban crises make beneficiary identification and needs analysis problematic (Parker and Maynard 2015). Populations are widely dispersed and highly mobile. They may come from diverse ethnic groups and multiple countries. Language, cultural, and socioeconomic barriers may impede their access and participation in city life. As such, effectively assisting refugees in urban areas requires new models and approaches. However, the experience, skill sets, and tools of humanitarians are still primarily grounded in rural or camp settings (IRC 2015) and, as a result, there are substantial knowledge and expertise gaps in the sector (UN Habitat 2011). These new approaches necessitate capitalizing on what is already there—existing services, market opportunities, and infrastructure and further capacitating them so that they are able to include the refugee populations. This requires mapping of available services within a refugee-impact community—the schools, clinics, transportation routes, local NGO and CBO (community-based organizations) services, training centers, banks and microfinance institutions and the like, and then appropriately vetting those services for quality, capacity, scale, and scope of provisions. Creating referral pathways for refugees into the quality services available, that is, those that achieve the results expected, is vital to ensuring access and nondiscriminatory treatment. Donor resources must then be channeled to further capacitate the services used, for example, expanding schools, providing new equipment to clinics, improving access roads, and rehabilitating sewage treatment plants, depending on need.

This strategy is often referred to as an area-based approach or an integrated development approach with an emphasis on improving the range of vital services and infrastructure in a designated catchment or impacted area of a city (Parker and Maynard 2015). The strategy operationalizes the paradigm shift in humanitarian assistance the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) stated was required back in 2010, which they articulated as moving to a district- or community-based approach and away from focusing on individual beneficiaries (IASC 2010). It means targeting support to geographically bound areas rather than population groups (DFID and NRC 2014). This is critical as it allows for the entire population in a targeted area—host community members, refugees, the internally displaced,



and migrant populations present—to all benefit from improved services, enhanced capacity, and improved infrastructure. The approach also leaves behind the improvements, which continue to benefit host communities long after the refugees have returned home (Cintron and Wendell 2013).

### 5.3. *Just Give Them the Money*

Humanitarian agencies are increasingly foregoing direct economic program implementation and, instead, implementing cash transfers and other cash-based interventions as a ‘livelihoods’ support. While there are several types of cash transfers—conditional, unconditional, vouchers, and cash for work—the modality gaining rapid popularity is unconditional cash transfers. With these, people are given money as a direct grant with no conditions or work requirements. There is no requirement to repay any money, and people are entitled to use the money however they wish (Global Humanitarian Assistance 2012). Providing cash and allowing those targeted to use as needed—for rent, food, utilities, school fees—is far more cost-effective and efficient than setting up the services or delivering aid such as food parcels (Overseas Development Institute 2015). The growth in utility of this intervention is reflected by the following data—less than US\$10 million of humanitarian emergency funding was used for cash transfers in 2007 and this increased to nearly US\$190 million in 2010 (Global Humanitarian Assistance 2012). By 2014, international aid cash programming was estimated to be between \$1.2 and \$1.5 billion, roughly 5–6% of all humanitarian funding (Overseas Development Institute 2015).

Research indicates that cash transfers achieve benefits on par with or better than the much bigger, more costly programs traditionally established by NGOs to serve the affected population (Blattman and Niehaus 2014; Lentfer 2013). Urban environments are particularly conducive to cash transfer programs as many of the prerequisites are present including financial infrastructure, cash-based economies, mobile network coverage, access to diverse markets, and the availability of products and services (Mohiddin and Smith 2016). Cash transfers not only promote dignity, choice and empowerment while reducing negative coping strategies, they also get cash circulating in the local economy (Cash Learning Partnership (CaLP Cash Learning Partnership)). Introducing cash into strapped and stagnant economies can have broader benefits than just for those receiving the transfer. An International Rescue Committee report on cash transfer programming in the Syrian crisis in Lebanon found that each dollar of cash assistance spent by a household generated \$2.13 of GDP for the local Lebanese economy (IRC 2014).

While cash transfers can improve efficiencies, reduce costs, and likely achieve the same outcomes as other forms of humanitarian assistance (Overseas Development Institute 2015), much remains to be learned to maximize the effectiveness of cash programming. In many crises, including urban refugee contexts, cash transfers are used to address urgent needs—purchasing food, paying rent, covering heating costs, and paying school fees. Even when addressing these immediate needs, however, the ideal frequency, transfer amounts and duration of the cash transfers are little understood. Are onetime transfers sufficient? Should they be monthly? In what amounts and for how long? And do targeted households revert back to previous levels of need and vulnerability when the transfers stop? According to IRC research, for example, feedback from cash transfer program participants demonstrated that few managed to saved or invest any of their cash allotments, which meant that the benefits of such programs were of limited duration (IRC 2016).

Cash transfer programs are also often gender-neutral, thereby further limiting their potential impact. Unconditional cash transfers are generally disbursed to households to address basic consumption needs rather than as a tool for women’s economic empowerment or as a means to promote gender equality—an objective of all humanitarian work. In fact, a gendered assessment of cash transfer programs carried out by Concern Worldwide and Oxfam found that the cash transfers tended to reinforce rather than challenge women’s traditional household and social roles (Concern Worldwide and Oxfam GB 2011). Achieving the desired outcomes and impacts with cash

transfers will require building an evidence base that goes well beyond current questions of utility, technical modalities, and efficiencies.

#### 5.4. *Moving On Up (and Off of Assistance)*

Cash assistance and livelihood programs both play a critical role in urban humanitarian response but to increase their effectiveness, they should be bundled, flexible, and creative (IRC 2016). In fact, in order to ensure that benefits are maximized, cash transfers should be used to stabilize consumption needs for the poorest, while simultaneous, complementary interventions are provided to build the recipients' human and financial assets (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC 2017)). Cash transfers can be foundational building blocks for eventually achieving self-reliance by complementing with skills development components such as training programs, apprenticeships, access to savings, financial literacy, and entrepreneurship training followed by asset transfers, access to credit and job placement programs. This is referred to as the graduation approach which aims to 'graduate' people out of poverty and off of the need for humanitarian assistance altogether (De Montesquiou and Sheldon 2014).

Historically, humanitarian assistance focused on either meeting urgent needs or creating economic opportunities—not both simultaneously. As a result, in-kind assistance and cash grants intended for micro- and small-business start-up were diverted by households meeting their immediate consumption needs. The graduation approach addresses this issue and recognizes that beneficiaries have different needs—that the poorest need social protection/consumption support and human and financial asset building simultaneously, while those who are slightly better off may just need business development skills and access to credit in order to grow their business. The goal is for participants to 'graduate' to a sustainable livelihood within a defined period of time (generally 18 to 36 months) (De Montesquiou and Sheldon 2014). This is particularly vital for refugees in urban areas where stretched resources, expanding caseloads, and extended lengths of displacement require doing more with less. Promoting self-reliance and giving refugees the capacities and opportunities to provide for themselves is the best way to reduce dependency on unpredictable humanitarian aid, restore their dignity and promote their empowerment (United Nations General Assembly 2016). Graduating urban refugees off of assistance also allows for the rechanneling of that assistance to those who need it most.

Research in eight different countries, all development contexts, has shown that the graduation approach works with the vast majority of participants, some 75 to 98%, depending on the geography, not only leave the ultra-poor category within 24 months, but remain on an upward trajectory even four years after they've stopped receiving direct benefits (Davis 2015). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is now piloting the approach in several settings with the first pilots initiated in 2013 starting with refugees in Cairo, Egypt, and San Jose, Costa Rica (UNHCR 2014d). Adapting what has proven to work in development contexts to humanitarian and refugee contexts is critical for changing how we work and achieving more sustainable results.

#### 5.5. *Women as Game Changers*

Promoting the self-reliance of refugees in urban areas is critical to their protection, their ability to provide for themselves, and for maximizing limited humanitarian resources. This requires a thorough understanding of local markets and a mapping of refugee skill sets so that practitioners can match and marry needs to market opportunities. As humanitarian workers are seldom economists or well-versed in local economies and labor markets, humanitarian organizations may not be best placed to design livelihood interventions or facilitate access to livelihood opportunities (Jacobsen and Fratzke 2016). Effective programming may necessitate both new targets and new partners.

First and foremost among the new targets for economic interventions are refugee women. Just as women and men are affected differently by displacement, so too, are their livelihoods. Women often leave land-based, agrarian work for work in the unregulated informal sector in jobs that offer little security, safety, or dignity—as maids, servants, or as commercial sex workers (Buscher 2009). Men

often lose their ability to fulfil their traditional roles of protector and provider and find themselves ill-equipped for new urban market opportunities. Men's livelihoods are often less adaptive to new environments than are women's, whose childcare and household experiences can easily translate into domestic and service industry work. However, as gender roles and gender relations tend to shift as a result of conflict and displacement, humanitarians have both an opportunity and a responsibility to capitalize on these shifts to promote women's economic empowerment and gender equality more broadly.

Many economic programs targeting displaced women, however, while often the right thing to do, have not necessarily led to the right results. There are a myriad of reasons for this. Women are already shouldering too many of the household responsibilities to take full advantage of the opportunities on offer. Social norms may limit their mobility as well as their access to well-paid employment. Also, critically, because of historic and inherent gender discrimination, they may have had fewer opportunities for education, skills development, and work experience, rendering them ill-prepared for the humanitarian interventions targeting them. Women without previous entrepreneurial experience, for example, cannot be expected to start a small business with a loan unless they receive proper business planning, financial literacy, coaching, and follow-on support.

Women's work still tends to be of lower status in the labour market, concentrated in the informal economy in jobs that are poorly paid, offer less security, are less valued, and often performed under poorer working conditions. The jobs also generally offer fewer opportunities for advancement (Heintz 2008). Gender segmentation is endemic in labour markets, with women largely concentrated in unstable and poor-quality employment. Focus, therefore, cannot be just on securing employment or self-employment for women but rather on dignified work with decent pay with the goal of economic empowerment for women. Women's economic empowerment, however, is closely interlinked with and dependent on women's political and social empowerment. Income alone does not equate with empowerment. Empowerment is a multifaceted, long-term goal that relies on individual, social, institutional, and infrastructural change (Concern Worldwide and Oxfam GB 2011). Without proper analysis, livelihood programs can reinforce women's traditional gender roles, add burden by increasing workloads, upend power relations within the household, introduce women to new activities or places that heighten their risk of experiencing violence, and attract attacks by outside groups due to coveted assets (Women's Refugee Commission 2014). When the economic programs implemented are neither safe nor market-driven, they can actually undermine progress towards women's economic empowerment.

In spite of well-intentioned efforts to promote gender equality, providing access and opportunities for adult women when they have had fewer educational, skills development and employment opportunities than their male counterparts, is often a set-up for failure. This is not, however, to imply that empowerment programs should not be attempted, but rather that program designers and implementers recognize the barriers and challenges and the need to link economic opportunity with political and social participation, as well as with access to and control over resources.

Female labour force participation plays a critical role in cushioning households from the impact of economic shocks and keeping them out of poverty (Morrison et al. 2008). This thinking has huge implications for how and why humanitarians must engage refugee women in livelihood programs. Displaced women often respond to situations of deprivation in surprising ways: what emerges is a picture of resilience, resourcefulness, ingenuity, and flexibility (Golooba-Mutebi 2004). If given opportunities, women can drive economic development in their countries or communities of displacement as well as in their countries of origin when they are able to safely return (Hudock et al. 2016).

The decade or generation of displacement populations experience provides a window and the possibility to change women, their societies and, in the process, promote a more equitable world. Robert Zoellick, former President of the World Bank Group, has stated: "Gender and women's empowerment are at the core of what we need to do in development. It's not just a women's issue. Improved economic opportunities for women lead to better outcomes for families, societies and countries" (International



Finance Cooperation and the World Bank 2014). *The Economist* added, “Forget China, India and the internet: economic growth is driven by women” (*The Economist* 2006). The millions of women uprooted and displaced by violence and conflict must be included in this process and provided with opportunities to contribute and drive economic development—for their sake, for the sake of their families, and for the sake of the future of their countries of displacement and of origin and eventual return (*United Nations General Assembly* 2016).

### 5.6. New Partners

Changing business as usual within the humanitarian sphere requires rethinking traditional partnerships. Responding to urban crises, for example, requires greater partnership with nonhumanitarian actors (*Parker and Maynard* 2015). Implementation of an area-based approach, for instance, necessitates not only new modalities of working but also working with new partners—local community-based organizations (CBOs), national NGOs, host government ministries and departments, development actors, and the private sector (*IIED Human Settlements Group* 2017). The focus has to be on who has the expertise rather than on who we normally work with. UNHCR, as an example, is piloting the graduation approach with Trickle Up and BRAC,<sup>4</sup> both known for their development and antipoverty programs, not their refugee work. These are the types of partners and the types of expertise we need to tap. The traditional humanitarian and refugee NGOs, often international, frequently do not have the needed expertise and are probably not best placed to provide culturally and contextually appropriate services to refugees that are going to be locally sustainable (*Jacobsen and Fratzke* 2016).

What is needed are cost-effective models that build on what is already in place—existing capacity, presence, and local experience. Development organizations working with the host community urban poor need to be engaged to extend those same services to the refugee populations. Local human rights organizations need to include refugee protection within their remit. Local LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered) organizations and local DPOs (Disabled Persons Organizations) need to be engaged and inclusive of LGBT refugees and refugees with disabilities (*Women’s Refugee Commission* 2016). Local microfinance institutions (MFIs) need to be encouraged to expand their range of credit, savings, and microinsurance services to the urban displaced (*UNHCR* 2017).

The era of the big footprint, international NGOs parachuting in, setting up shop, chasing donor dollars and establishing a myriad of services which then close when the NGOs leave, either because the situation stabilizes or the funding dries up, need to be relegated to history. The model leaves little, if anything, sustainable or of longer-term benefit behind. It is costly and seldom constructively taps local capacity and knowledge. While local partners may be subgrantees, they are, in reality, mere implementers rather than real partners. With ever-increasing local civil society capacity throughout much of the world, the approach is outdated, inefficient, and a poor use of donor funds.

The role of the international NGOs needs to evolve and catch up with the changing times and needs—from one of service provider to one of mentors and capacity developers in the true sense of the word. They need to map resources, services, and potential partners and actors and engage them to inform and lead the response.

The private sector needs to be included among these new partners. There has been considerable rhetoric about private-sector engagement but much of it around engaging them as project donors, not as implementing partners. Partnering with and supporting local businesses so that they can expand and thereby create additional employment opportunities is an example of the type of partnership

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<sup>4</sup> Known formerly as the Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee and then as the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (currently, BRAC does not represent an acronym), BRAC was initiated in 1972 as a small-scale relief and rehabilitation project to help returning war refugees after the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971. At the end of 1972, when the first phase of relief work was over, BRAC turned towards long-term development needs and re-organized itself to focus on the empowerment of the poor and landless, particularly women and children.

needed. The private sector needs to be engaged to train refugees, to hire refugees, and to provide financial services to refugees. The private sector needs to be involved in the upgrading of slums, in the provision of technology, and in contributing energy and ideas to seemingly intractable urban problems. The Tent Foundation is already leading efforts on private-sector engagement to expand employment opportunities for refugees and integrating them into supply chains.<sup>5</sup> While the majority of these efforts target multinational corporations, private-sector engagement has to move down to the national and local level actors—those who are hiring in Kampala and Nairobi and Beirut.

### 5.7. New Funding Modalities

Engaging new partners and new ways of working also requires changing how donor funding is channeled and utilized. The ever-growing number of refugees and the increasing length of displacement means the needs are far outstripping available resources. There is neither the political will nor the resultant donor dollars to continue to feed and support the millions of refugees reliant on humanitarian assistance, especially food and cash assistance. Not only are new modalities of working required by service providers, donors, too, need to change what and who they support.

Using donor funding to capacitate existing, impacted host government services requires channeling funds through Ministries of Education and Ministries of Urban Planning, instead of traditional international NGO and UN agency partners. When international NGOs do receive funding support, it should be to support their roles as conveners and facilitators of action, as catalysts advocating for change, and as providers of technical support to existing entities instead for direct program delivery and implementation. This has implications for donor grants, for donor accountability to their constituents, and for proposal review, approval, and monitoring processes. It means changing the way traditional donors do business. It requires increased flexibility, the devolution of responsibility to partners, and the use of different indicators and measures of reporting and evaluation. The historic numbers reporting game, number of people fed, and number of refugees trained, needs to change to—capacity built, access facilitated, referrals made, and infrastructure improved.

Donors will have to move away from project funding, such as supporting an NGO-established health clinic. Instead, the donor should use those funds to support a clinic in an impacted neighborhood, or directly supporting the Ministry of Health so that it supports that clinic, or funding an NGO to provide technical support to the clinic. It might require channeling humanitarian funds to existing or new development projects, such as urban electrification, which could benefit both the refugees and the host communities. This changes the concept of humanitarian aid and the potential targets—away from individual beneficiaries and towards the services and infrastructure needed by those beneficiaries. Humanitarian funding has been used this way previously but not widely. In Jordan, humanitarian funding was used to upgrade public schools as a means of negotiating Iraqi refugee access to public education as well as to upgrade informal settlements for Palestinian refugees and host communities (Cintron and Wendell 2013). In Tanzania, humanitarian funding was used to rehabilitate host government schools and clinics and build roads in refugee-impacted rural areas (Cintron and Wendell 2013). In addition, in northern Ecuador, the presence of Colombian refugees was the driver that channeled resources to an impoverished region but the benefits were not isolated to the refugee community but extended to impact the local population (Cintron and Wendell 2013). Under the UNHCR-led Zambia Initiative, resources were used to build community wells, grain storage bins, construct health-posts, and rehabilitate trade schools to serve both refugees and host community members (UNHCR 2004). These examples demonstrate that it can be done and can lead to lasting benefits for host countries and communities.

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<sup>5</sup> Refer to the Tent Foundation's website at: <https://www.tent.org/>.

## 6. Restoring Dignity; Building Resilience

Humanitarian assistance has a somewhat tainted but ever-evolving history. Starting off as charity, often led by religious institutions, it treated beneficiaries as needy, vulnerable victims of tragic events. It was northern/western-led with little appreciation for aid recipients' capacity and potential. The approach was top-down and the focus was on life-saving. Give them food, give them clothes, give them shelter and expect them to be grateful. It led to dependency and a loss of voice and dignity amongst recipients. This started changing with an expansion of aid into many additional sectors and services which required more thorough needs assessments and actual consultation with affected communities about their needs and priorities. Giving them voice and recognizing their agency led to more informed programming and the increased participation of the beneficiaries the programs were intended to serve.

At present, humanitarian practitioners still largely design programs *for* the affected populations but more often based on their input, ideas, and participation. Humanitarian aid recipients are now much more likely to be consulted but they are yet to be real partners in program design, implementation, and evaluation. Humanitarian workers are still reluctant to turn over decision-making authority and control of humanitarian resources to the target populations. We have yet to fully trust and embrace the concept that 'they know best'.

Further, humanitarians have yet to adequately capture the collective impact of humanitarian efforts on the affected populations. Evaluations capture individual programs and usually only measure process indicators, that is, did we do what we said we were going to do, rather than impact indicators—what has changed with the target population? Are they better off? Recipients are more often cut off from services when funding is cut rather than because we can definitively say they no longer need the support. To address this issue, the Women's Refugee Commission drafted a 'Well-Being Index' which captures change across 12 simple indicators (income, employment, shelter, utilities, food, health care, transportation, education, community involvement, safety, documentation, and well-being) each on a progressive scale of 1–5. The Index was piloted in Lebanon, Egypt, and Ecuador tracking 900 households over a 6–18-month period with the intention of capturing reductions in vulnerability and increases in well-being and self-reliance. It was designed to capture the collective impact of humanitarian assistance on the target population. Are we achieving our broader humanitarian objectives and not just our individual program objectives? End-line data analysis demonstrated that a simple tool could efficiently and easily capture change (or the lack thereof) over time on the indicators of most relevance to humanitarian actors. Increases in employment, for example, largely co-related to increases in school attendance, access to healthcare, and appropriate shelter (Buscher 2017). Going forward, if we, as a community, proclaim that we promote self-reliance and build resilience, we need measurements such as this Index to demonstrate our impact and target populations' progress.

Restoring dignity and building resilience, however, requires more than just measurement to capture change, it requires new forms of engagement with the affected communities. No longer just consulted in needs assessment processes, aid recipients must shape and lead humanitarian response. The increasingly urban nature of displacement is forcing humanitarians to develop new models and approaches which must include tapping into the existing skills and experiences of the displaced, utilizing their capacity and potential, and helping them design and drive the requisite solutions.

Restoring dignity and building resilience can be best achieved through access to livelihoods—providing opportunities for refugees to address their own needs, make their own choices, and plan their own futures. Cash transfers can be a building block for a more sustainable livelihood and are a critical component of a graduation approach especially for the poorest of the poor. Others, however, require different interventions based on their skills and experience—vocational training, apprenticeships, microcredit loans, entrepreneurial training, financial literacy, direct job placement, and so on. The objectives should be promoting self-reliance, starting where the client/refugee is, and measuring impact to ensure that the results are being achieved.

The growing numbers of the forcibly displaced—now over 68.5 million (UNHCR 2018b)—and the increasing length of their displacement—approaching twenty years, on average for refugees (Loescher 2011)—coupled with the growing number of crises and overstretched humanitarian resources, when viewed collectively, make it ever more critical that self-reliance be promoted early and systematically. The complexity and frequency of crises and the expanding urban nature of displacement result in populations that are more dispersed, and harder to reach and service; their needs far outstrip the parallel growth in humanitarian resources. It is unlikely that donors' financial resources will keep pace with the seemingly ever-growing needs. Consequently, the forcibly displaced must be enabled to address their own needs as quickly and sustainably as possible. This means assisting them to preserve the assets they do have and to build the assets they require. This means providing safe, dignified opportunities to all—women and men, youth and adults and using the upheaval of displacement to promote more sustainable development and a more gender equitable world. This also means measuring the impact of humanitarian inputs and services to allow for responsible disengagement from those who achieve self-reliance and re-directing scarce resources towards those with greatest need.

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