Perception of Refugees towards International Humanitarian Aid in the Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya

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Abstract: Most academic reports on encamped refugees deal with the immediate needs of the displaced people with no reference to their socio-cultural value system. The theory and praxis of humanitarian assistance emerge from concerns of international community for making it truly humanitarian and impartial. This paper explores the perceptions of African refugees concerning the international aid provided by humanitarian agencies in Kakuma Refugee Camp. A mixed method research design guided the quantitative and qualitative process of data collecting, analyzing and triangulation protocol. Simple random, strata and purposive techniques were used to sample 484 participants. Statistical descriptive analysis and thematic organization of qualitative data facilitated validation of results and construction of meta-themes. The results revealed the imbalance in relationship between “powerful” givers and “powerless” recipients in the refugee camp, and unveiled the African perception of hidden power behind the “gift” offered by a powerful giver. The findings suggest that a purely pragmatic approach to humanitarian assistance hampers positive social transformation of encamped refugees. This calls upon the international agents to adopt a broader and more flexible interpretation of humanitarian assistance conventions and their application to externally displaced people.

Key words: Refugees, Humanitarian Aid, Provider, Powerfulness, Receiver, Powerlessness

Introduction

Throughout human history, people of every race have been forced to flee their home countries and seek safety from persecution, political violence and/or armed conflict. In the General Assembly held in Geneva on 18th June 2015, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], Antonio Guterres, expressed his concern over the increasing number of refugees, especially in Europe. In his report, he mentioned that at the end of 2014 there were 59.5 million of refugees scattered all over the world (UNHCR, 2015a). Globally, one in every 122 humans is either a refugee, an internally displaced person, or an asylum seeker. Detailed reports indicate that 51% of all refugees are in Europe; 31% in Asia; 17% in Africa and 12% in America (UNHCR, 2015b). The European Union identifies three basic “solutions” to forced displacement (UNHCR, 2010): 1. “Voluntary Repatriation” (pp. 191-103), 2. “Local Integration” (pp. 193-197) and 3. “Resettlement” (pp. 197-199). The major strategy leading to durable solution of refugee situation in Europe is integration of refugees into host society. In Africa, people flee countries like South Sudan, Central African Republic (CAR), Nigeria, Burundi, Somalia, Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) fearing consequences of wars and political conflicts. There are estimated three million refugees in sub-Saharan Africa (APO, 2015). Even though the 1969 supplementary convention of Organization of African States [OAU] exhorted Africans to exercise hospitality towards their fellow Africans, most refugees find themselves in refugee camps. Sub-Saharan Africa has the largest number of refugee camps with protracted situations (17), with approximately 2 million refugees. The largest groups rely on hospitality of Guinea, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia (UNHCR, 2004). It is estimated
that as many as 98% of sub-Saharan African refugees are confined to refugee camps (Kamara, 2009).

Despite the well-documented human right concerns, the policy which requires refugees to live in a designated area set aside for the exclusive use of refugees has become the predominant method for “protecting” refugees in Africa. There is substantial evidence that the bureaucratic refugee protection industry, actively supports this policy of “keeping refugees in camps and dependent on relief” (Harrell-Bond, 1986, 2002). In addition, the host-states “prefer the encampment of refugees for several reasons: 1) they offer visibility which helps with claims for burden sharing; 2) they offer mechanisms for containment and control which help to mitigate any perceived security threat in the short term, and 3) they reduce the risk that refugee populations might melt into the host population” (Kaiser, 2006, p. 598). The UNHCR (2014, p. 4) began questioning the “effective” approaches of international humanitarian agencies to encamped refugees. In the same line of thinking the K4D (2017) Helpdesk Report raises concerns about the impact of “mode of assistance,” restricting “freedom of movement” and the “mode of governance” (p.3), of humanitarian assistance agencies. In the context of refugee camps located in Kenya the UNHCR and other collaborating partners colour those issues with humanism and philanthropy and focus on implementing international agendas.

Kenyan Refugee Act of 2007 established a Department for Refugee Affairs (DRA) and began overseeing the registration, coordination, and management of issues related to refugees within the territory of Kenya. The Refugee Act 2007 restricts the movement of refugees within the designated camps (Dadaab and Kakuma), and prohibits them from engaging in economic activities outside the camps. In Kenya’s policy on refugees the encampment is the main measure the government takes in addressing the refugee situation on a policy level (UNHCR, 2011). According to the 2015 statistical data in Kenya there were 650,610 refugees and asylum seekers, of whom 630,610 were assisted by the UNHCR in Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps (UNHCR, 2015b). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) runs those camps with the help of collaborating partners, each charged with a specific responsibility. For instance, education is under the Lutheran World Federation/Department for World Services (LWF/DWS), adult education, sanitation and health under the International Rescue Committee (IRC). There is also the World Food Programme (WFP) in charge of feeding the refugees, the Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS) offers scholarships and counselling. By locating refugees in refugee camps, and entrusting them into administration of the UNHCR, the Kenyan Government has lost its protective powers over matters pertaining to the human rights of refugees guaranteed by 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol. Even though the Government of Kenya provides the necessary administrative and security back up and generally maintains law and order in the camp, the UNHCR manages day-to-day life of the camp guided by the humanitarian assistance principles.

Humanitarian assistance principles refer to the policies underlying international humanitarian law. In a narrower sense, they guide the work of relief agencies like the UNHCR, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), and International Organization for Migration (IOM). There are two humanitarian assistance principles mentioned in the Geneva Conventions and Protocols that qualify legitimate relief activity: humanitarian, and impartial (Mackintosh, 2000, pp.7-8). Additional principles of neutrality and independence were necessarily included in structures of humanitarian assistance in collaboration with other NGOs (Pictet, 1979). Generally, modern international law is understood as a legal system based on Western understanding of
human person. The guiding principle of humanitarian action emphasizes the value of human life, with a view of protecting people in times of peril and emergency.

The Research

Refugees arriving at the refugee camp require from the host as well as international communities an extensive assistance. In the Kakuma Refugee Camp the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) runs the camp with the help of collaborating partners and the Government of Kenya takes the position of administrative and security back up. Being a chief provider, the international humanitarian organizations alleviate refugees’ suffering by providing them basic needs (UNHCR, 2017). Ideally, the refugee situation in Kenya should be the concern of both the host Government and international communities. However, the current camp administration is entrusted to the UNHCR and other international agencies. The weight of humanitarian assistance principles and material potentialities of international agencies applied to vulnerable African refugees gives rise to disregard of socio-cultural values of refugees. It seems that humanitarian assistance agencies find it difficult to address the needs of African people-in-need so that their human dignity is safeguarded and cultural identity respected. The current approach to refugees seems to contribute to disintegration of human values, generating “high incidents of violence, exploitation and other criminal activities,” which leave refugees “passive recipients of humanitarian assistance and continuing to live in idleness and despair” (UNHCR, 2002). This article aims at investigating refugees’ perception towards international humanitarian aid in the Kakuma Refugee Camp. A purpose-build scientific investigation pursued three major questions: 1). What is refugees’ perception towards the mode of governing refugee camp by international agencies?, 2). What is refugees’ perception towards current distribution of humanitarian aid?, 3). What is refugees’ perception towards “protection” of minority groups in the context of refugee camp?

This study was guided by the subject-power theory developed by Michel Foucault. The subject-power theory focused on organized and enclosed community “subject” (Refugee Camp) and authoritarian forces “power” (UNHCR and collaborating partners). Foucault (1994) indicated the applicability of his theory where power-exercise generates polarities: “It incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; it releases or contrives [and] makes more probable or less” (p. 340). In the context of the refugee camp, the camp authorities manage and control the political, social and economic possibilities of vulnerable subjects. The measurability of power-affected subjects in terms of feelings, perceptions and patterns of thought was another factor which contributed to the choice of this theory.

This study adopted a mixed method design using quantitative and qualitative approach to data collecting, analyzing and developing of triangulation protocol. The target population of this research consisted of 192,218 African refugees (UNHCR, 2016). Simple random, strata and purposive techniques were used to select 484 Burundians, Congolese and South Sudanese participants. Quantitative sample size (n = 420) was determined by Krejcie and Morgan formula (1970), applying 95% confidence interval and 5% maximum allowance for standard error. For qualitative data collection and analysis sample size (n = 64) was determined by use of purposive techniques of sampling. Among all (n = 484) participants, 420 filled questionnaires, 46 participated in oral interviews and 18 took part in group discussions. Reliability of instruments for quantitative data was tested by Cronbach’s alpha (α) reliability test. The Maxwell’s (1992) typologies of validity were applied for examination of the collected data. The “descriptive validity” checked for the accuracy of the information; “theoretical validity” was based on mental
process to acquire cognitive blueprint of the study and “interpretive validity” cross-checked the narrative reports against the original verbatim of the respondents. The findings have been summarized under three themes: 1) Authority of the camp administration, 2) Socio-cultural impact of humanitarian aid, and 3) “Protection” of minority groups.

Authority of the Camp Administration. In the camp the UNHCR occupy a privileged position of having a control over the basic needs and facilitating the repatriation process. In such environment a question was posed to refugees concerning the nature of authority exercised over refugees. A senior UNHCR officer stated: “In day-to-day interaction with the camp administration [Refugees] are exposed to UNHCR agents who speak, act and teach refugees following Western set of values.” Looking at the role of camp administration through the subject-power theory, it seems that the administrative powers of the camp deepen in refugees a spirit of submission and compliance. The current mode of camp administration seem to evoke in refugees feelings of discouragement and desperation. The results indicated that 56.6% of all respondents believed that the current modus operandi of the UNHCR and their collaborating partners generate among refugees a feeling of hopelessness. The ANOVA test showed that there was a significant difference between national groups (p < .05) in the degree of “hopelessness.” Forty-six (76.7%) of all (n = 60) Burundians acknowledged that the spirit of hopelessness was a part of their lives in the camp.

A 31 years old Burundi respondent stated: “The camp administration regulates all aspects of our lives; all documentation, the process of repatriation, and all we need for survival.” Thirty-seven (56.0%) of all (n = 66) Congolese were inclined to take a middle position while speaking of the camp administration. A 30 years old female DRC participant observed that in the refugee camp “all [refugees and non-refugees] are under the authority of the UNHCR.” Among all (n = 285) South Sudanese there were 106 (37.2%) who perceived camp administration as a sort of suppressing power. A 32 years of South Sudanese respondent said: “Camp administration has great authority over us because we receive from them all our basic needs such as food, shelter, water, medicine; without them, we would not survive.” The results point to various reasons generating hopelessness among refugees. Some are discouraged because of the unstable socio-political situation in their home countries, others had lost the vision of future life and still others struggle to adapt to the refugee camp governed by a set of rules and regulations.

Socio-cultural Impact of Humanitarian Aid. Supplying food and other basic goods to encamped refugees remains at the core of humanitarian aid. According to a 30 years old Congolese male the action of the UNHCR “keeps us alive and provides us shelter.” The exercise of distributing food and other basic needs to refugees can be easily described as an act of benevolence. However, many African refugees felt uncomfortable with the passive reception of basic rations from the camp administration. A senior officer working in the UNHCR headquarters explained the matter: “It is humiliating to be dependent, especially for men to queue up with children and women for [the] food ration. Some men do not collect their ration because it is too humiliating for them.” In the same line of thinking a 34 years old South Sudanese refugee expressed his feelings: “It does not feel good to receive free things.” Still another respondent, a 27 year Burundi male respondent added: “It feels as if I have no value.” According to a senior operational officer working in the UNHCR headquarters the most affected people are men who once were the heads of their families. In the refugee camp they have much less to say than in their home countries.
Material deprivation fosters among refugees some coping techniques which focus on survival. A 56 years old staff member of WFP observed: “There are people who move from place to place…, from organization to organization…, from church to church… in view of accumulating material things.” In the context of relying on humanitarian aid handouts refugees shared their thoughts about the far-reaching consequences of the passive reception of material goods. A female pastoral agent, who for the last three years lived with refugees witnessed to the negative effects of the continuous aid reception: “Those who settle in the camp become complacent and always expect everything to be given, they become people who constantly demand.” The most frequently words used in a narrative part of questionnaires with reference to the UNHCR and other organizations were “provide us”, “give us”; “help us”, “offer us.” This situation develops in refugees “dependence syndrome” with far-reaching consequences. A senior officer working in the UNHCR headquarters pointed to the process of character deformation caused by prolonged reception of material goods with no involvement of the recipient: “A long term consequence of being ‘provided with’ is that they [refugees] will always feel that it is their right to receive from other people.” In the same line of thinking a 54 years old South Sudanese male refugee added: “Material dependence is dangerous…, especially those who were born in the camp, they will not be able to live on their own neither in the camp nor outside of it.”

An important observation was made by a 25 years old South Sudanese refugee concerning the relationship between self-reliance and adulthood. According to him “[passive] reception of material goods reduces people to children who depend on parents.” A 39 years old Congolese refugee bitterly complained about his unutilized capacity of self-reliance: “In my culture the ability of providing for oneself and others is a measure of adulthood.” In relation to the theme of “adulthood” a 40 years old Congolese man observed: “When a person is self-reliant then he/she is able to make personal decisions… Here [in the camp] we are not able to make our own decisions.” A WFP senior officer recognized the negative effects of humanitarian aid: “Providing things for refugees may perpetuate poverty because some may remain idle, receiving ration after ration.” This position indicates that people who are exposed to material aid for a prolonged period begin to perceive real life through the lenses of the material dependency.

“Protection” of Minority Groups. In the spirit of the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol the international humanitarian agencies are resolutely committed to protecting refugees. The concept of protection is framed by humanitarian assistance principles governing refugee camps which are managed by the UNHCR and other international agencies. In this way the Western understanding of protection becomes a “rule” in the Kakuma Refugee Camp.

Restriction of movement is a requirement of the UNHCR and other humanitarian assistance agencies. Even though the refugee camp is not fenced, the remote location of the camp makes it self-secluded. For travelling, every refugee is required to obtain a travel permit. A 37 years old Burundi male acknowledged this by saying: “Refugees are not allowed to travel out of the camp; the process of obtaining travel permit is rigorous and takes a long time.” Another 32 years old South Sudanese female participant complained about being impeded from visiting her family members: “We lose touch with the outside world, we cannot visit our people back in our home country. Processing of travel permits takes such a long time!” The restriction of movement outside the camp was also commented on by a 45 years old male Burundian: “We are here somehow like prisoners, yet we have not committed crimes.” In general, the refugees consider the policy restricting their movements as a factor contributing to socio-cultural alienation from their fellow citizens and the Kenyan population.
Child protection aims at protecting children from abuse, mistreatment and exploitation. A 24 years old South Sudanese male respondent expressed his perception concerning the approach to child protection in the camp: “The policies governing the ‘child protection’ are from the West. The agencies working in the camp turned the whole issue upside down. In the camp, parents and guardians have no say over their children”. They find it difficult to accept the sort of institutionalized child protection. It seems that there is a tension between parent-oriented child protection and the preference of the camp administration for non-parent child protection. A South Sudanese male respondent who has stayed in the camp for the last 16 years observed: “There is a general shift of authority from parents and elders to humanitarian assistance agencies.” In the present situation, many refugee parents feel helpless. In general, refugee and non-refugee respondents think that the current “child protection” approach does not take into consideration child-upbringing in the African context. Keeping in mind the African worldview, the entire society, especially brothers, sisters, uncles, aunties, grandmothers, grandfathers, and the elders were responsible for the upbringing of children.

Gender protection deals with protecting refugees (mainly female) from abuses emerging from gender domination. A 39 years old male Congolese respondent provided information concerning modalities of gender protection in the camp: “Here [in the camp] we have [the] ‘Gender Protection Office’ where women can complain about genuine or non-genuine mistreatment by their husbands. However, some refugees pointed to the weaknesses in the gender protection policies: “Some women take advantage of gender protection policies. We have witnessed family separation because of a simple misunderstanding between husband and wife.” In general opinion of male respondents the Office of Gender Protection does not take into consideration the value of unity in family. Without going into details, it relocates women in the camp or even grants them repatriation to other countries.

Same-sex union protection in the refugee camp appeared to a number of refugees as a situational phenomenon. Observing the living conditions of those in same-sex unions, a 27 years old Burundian respondent explained: “The homosexuals are treated by the UNHCR in a special way. They have a separate settlement and they are provided [with] more things than us, their process for repatriation is much faster.” In the perception of refugees, the phenomenon of “cohabiting” by individuals of the same-sex is one of the coping strategies. A 45 years old Burundian respondent observed: “Homosexuality draws many young people because they see that they are protected, taken care of and they are given preference for resettlement.” Looking at the issue of same-sex unions, 58% of all refugee and non-refugee respondents thought that homosexuality in the refugee camp was a sort of a situational phenomenon fueled by favorable conditions set out in the international humanitarian assistance principles.

Discussion

The service of international humanitarian aid is highly valued by externally displaced people all over the world for providing logistics and administration of refugee camps such as Kakuma Refugee Camp. Together with positive factors of humanitarian assistance there is a general feeling that the material aid is overshadowed by the subject-power relationship. In this imbalanced relationship the refugees play a role of “passive” receivers and the international agencies take position of an “active” provider. The state of helplessness and powerlessness of the refugees indicates that the action of humanitarian assistance agencies has access not only to the material needs of refugees but also to the core of their personalities. The empirical study
challenges this approach because the Western-made principles for assisting refugees in Africa seem to generate some side-effects which cause alternations in refugees’ personalities.

Any person visiting the Kakuma Refugee Camp would have the impression of being in the midst of a busy city governed by the UNHCR. A distinctive UNHCR badge is seen on vehicles, tents, buildings, paper bags, signposts and buildings among others. On daily basis refugees mention the UNHCR in relation to the registration, food, accommodation, medical care, education, travel permits and repatriation. All these aspects emerge from humanitarian assistance principles concerned with the “protection” of refugees. “Protection” is a concept used by the international humanitarian aid agencies in reference to the physical needs of refugees; sufficient food, clothing, safety from violence and persecution, medical care, and so on. This usually includes a consideration of the emotional and psychological wellbeing of the refugees.

This study has revealed that the refugees spent on average 5.6 years in the camp. The literature indicates that the “temporary” shelters have become permanent “residences”, where refugees stay for years, usually restricted in their movement, not permitted to make a living, and forced into dependence (O’Romano, 2004, p.10). Within prolonged period, the humanitarian assistance principles have become a “rule” of living within the refugee camp. In the light of subject – power theory (Foucault, 1979), the ideological underpinnings of international humanitarian assistance principles seem to amplify their position by overemphasizing the importance of the material needs of refugees. In the context of the refugee camp the refugees pay great attention to the in-camp regulations like restriction of movement within the camp, food rationing and matters pertaining to repartition. In this way the administrative power of the camp administration deepens in refugees the spirit of submission and compliance. This approach gives an impression that human beings are constructed as “empty” entities (Cushman, 1990, pp. 599-601). In this line of thinking 65.6% of all refugees (n = 411) states that current method of “protecting” refugees generate in them the spirit of hopelessness.

The effects of partial protection of refugees leads to the emergence of self-made survival techniques. Among 411 respondents, 37.3% observed that children take advantage of child protection as understood and exercised by international agencies. The parents are threatened and manipulated by the children who use the Office of Child Protection for their own advantage. Keeping in mind the African worldview, the entire society, especially parents, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, grandmothers, grandfathers, and the elders should be involved in the upbringing of children. Another survival technique is predominant among female refugees in the Gender Protection Office. Here, women feel assured of a place where they can express their grievances. However, 36.4% of all (n = 411) respondents believe that some women take advantage of gender protection policies magnifying their home-born affairs out of proportion. Same-sex unions is another factor deriving from protective attitudes of the camp administration. More than half (58%) of all respondents (n = 411) believe that same-sex unions is the in-camp phenomenon with its own agenda. The exposure to vulnerability groups creates an opportunity for tapping benefits deriving from materially enhanced “protection.” The destabilized socio-cultural infrastructures of the refugee camp evoke in refugees a feeling of independence and diminished social accountability. In this spirit a new philosophy of life emerges: “Live as you wish.”

The misunderstood and unguided individual freedom is a Western ideology which includes individualism, democracy, personal liberty and the release from family ties. Van der Walt (1997, pp.29-44) listed some forty characteristics of African communalism that contrast with Western individualism. These characteristics can be summarized in terms of communal self-respect, interdependence, survival of the community, group assurance, cooperation and
harmony, affiliation and shared duties. The ideology of personal freedom promoted by the camp authority seems to contradict the African collectivistic attitude to community. Mbiti (1969) expressed his conviction and conviction of many African theologians that in Africa to be human is “to belong to the community” (p.2). In the African traditional as well as contemporary societies the consolidated forms of interdependence between individual freedom and purpose driven society constitute (d) an ideal community model. The harmony in social relationships is of great value to African people, to the extent that, at times, the personal actualization needs to give precedence to the common good of the community.

Placing refugees in remote places such as Kakuma makes clear distinction between people who need assistance (refugees) and those who can provide assistance (agencies). From the side of humanitarian assistance agencies, the activity of “giving” basic provisions to refugees could be perceived as a gesture of benevolence, kindness or a kind of philanthropy. However, it could be also thought that the UNHCR and other governing bodies “create” the needs of encamped refugees and at the same time fulfil them under the umbrella of humanitarian relief? Nolan, (2015) describes this situation as “a collective expression understood as a decontextualized collective power structure yielding a culture of individuals with destabilized sense of self” (p. 13). The “decontextualized collective power structure” derives from the consensus among international agents on the theoretical as well as practical nature of the humanitarian relief. The ability of the international humanitarian assistance agencies to provide materially deprived persons produces “power structure” based on Western-made principles. Consequently, this approach “creates” a sort of society-in-need where the “receiving” of basic needs increasingly becomes a new philosophy of life.

Humanitarian aid can be seen as a gift. The African view on a gift seems to apply to the relationship between refugee camp administration and refugees. In this relationship the humanitarian assistance agencies play a role of givers and the refugees take the position of receivers. In this power-subject relationship, the materially deprived refugees should feel morally indebted to their benefactors. However, in the African understanding, a gift is a powerful means of developing or tightening the bonds of relationship. In archaic societies and in the African traditional context, the bond created by the exchange of material things involves human and spiritual alliance. According to Mauss (1954) “One gives away what is in reality a part of one’s nature and substance, while to receive something is to receive a part of someone’s spiritual essence” (p.10). He implies that any form of gift, whatever it is, possessions, children, food or women, it retains religious and magical hold over the recipient. It seems that this line of thinking is still prevalent in contemporary times, especially in the refugee camp.

The international agencies provide basic needs to refugees in the spirit of soft reciprocity. Under the surface of humanitarian aid, they expect from refugees an appreciation and gratitude and from hosting government, a favorable political relationships for economic advantages. Looking at the material emphasis of foreign aid in Africa, Harries (2015) concludes: “Because there is no ‘free gift’, therefore there can be no true ‘aid.’” This could be true because the perceived benevolence of the humanitarian aid and the ingratitude of the refugees creates a sort of contradiction. In the process of extreme “subordination”, the refugees end up in “silent” rejection of the giver. Paradoxically, constant giving does not always endear the heart of the recipient to that of a donor, it may result in a hardening of the heart. This is because a gift, stripped of inner values makes the recipient “small.” The overemphasis on the material factor of foreign aid results in affirming the position of a giver and belittling the receiver.
According to Nolan (2015) “the modern state has overused materialism as a form of governance” (p. 2). This situation seems to fit into the “Subject – power” theory, as Foucault believed that the power factor attached to meeting basic needs of dependent subjects amplifies the governing ability of the giver. At the same time the receiver gradually submerges into materialism on account of habitual reception of material goods and inability to engage actively in matters pertaining to self-development. Consequently, individuals who are highly focused on materialistic values have a low self-image, a low degree of life satisfaction and they show signs of unhappiness, despair, anxiety, depression and anti-social behaviors. A wide-spread in-camp idleness (86.6%) appears to be responsible for “high incidents of violence, exploitation and other criminal activities” (UNHCR; 2002, 2003). The consequences of unproductive and meaningless mode of living is “hopelessness” which weakens the inner powers needed to struggle for high standards of physical and spiritual life. The current execution of humanitarian aid has both short- and long-term repercussions. In comparison to the previous economic status, refugees observe that the current passive reception of material goods reduces their capacity to make their own decisions about their lives and that of their families.

Conclusion

Based on analysis of research data, some conclusions were drawn. The international humanitarian assistance conventions need not to be redrafted but their policies could adopt a broader, more flexible interpretation of protection of displaced persons. The protection of the encamped refugees should take into consideration the existential vulnerability of refugees and their limited life-choices. Food insecurity, extreme poverty, and the general state of in-camp hopelessness might be the result of current humanitarian assistance policies generating unsustainable conditions for survival. The refugees’ state of hopelessness is due, in part, to the fact that the humanitarian assistance authorities do not make enough effort to sustain refugees’ socio socio-cultural frame of values.

The UNHCR and collaborating partners should take into consideration the negative effects of subject – power relationship. They need to move from structural forms of authority to personal contacts with the refugees. The humanitarian assistance agents need to be more visible among refugees, talking and listening to them. In the African context, the aspect of personal contact with people is valued as a gesture of respect, friendliness and hospitality. The interpersonal contacts with refugees will enhance the humanitarian assistance and give the refugees a feeling that somebody is truly interested in them. Humanitarian assistance agencies should directly consult with refugees about how they understand their situation and the problems they face. By listening to refugees the international agents of humanitarian assistance would acquire direct information about material and non-material needs of refugees.

The wide-spread idleness perpetuates among refugees poverty and fosters individualistic philosophy of life. There is a danger that people who lived for a prolonged period of time in the spirit of dependence may hesitate to return home or integrate with the people in countries of repatriation. Rather than concentrating on a letter of “policy” the international humanitarian assistance agencies need to look for durable solutions promoting self-reliance. In broad perspective the facilitation of voluntary repatriation or resettlement to another country may be a solution to limited number of refugees. In the absence of immediate opportunities to return home or resettlement there is a need for close collaboration of international agencies with local authorities in view of developing for refugees socio-economic rights. Through acquiring new

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skills, engagement in farming and business the refugees will be able to support themselves and their families in more sustainable manner.

Refugees and Social Transformation

Refugee situations involve multi-dimensional social transformation. People driven away from their home countries are forced to re-orient their former “life projects.” Transformation involves changes in demographic and socio-cultural changes of hosting communities. Also, transformation refers to mental changes in refugees’ perception of their future marked by uncertainties. In the Kakuma Refugee Camp the international humanitarian bodies like the UNHCR and other collaborating partners, consciously or unconsciously, shape social transformation of refugees. The current top-down approach results in emergence of dependence syndrome and passivity among refugees. In the spirit of low self-image, low degree of life satisfaction, unhappiness, despair and anxiety the refugees seem to degenerate. Consequently, this leads to emergence of materialism, individualism and anti-social behaviors. One can observe that some refugees play victims of external displacement and fail to utilize new opportunities available to them. However, the present method of keeping refugees in refugee camps directly contributes to acute material deprivation and the lack of opportunities for self-reliance projects. In this way social stagnation or transformation of encamped refugees is a domain of humanitarian assistance policy makers and practitioners.

The notion of agency in the process of social transformation requires from refugee camp administration creating frameworks which could heal refugees’ past experiences and empower them for the “uncertain” future. In order to assess the content and methods of fostering positive social transformation the humanitarian assistance agents need to directly consult with refugees about how they understand their situation. By listening to refugees the international agents of humanitarian assistance would be informed about their material and non-material needs. The Faith-based agents could be incorporated into camp administration in view of attending to the spiritual needs of refugees. By championing the universal values of solidarity and piety, the faith-based organizations could contribute considerably to the move from an over-emphasis on the material needs of refugees to a more holistic approach to their situation.

The language used by policymaking making bodies calls for a change, from tolerance to mutual respect and understanding. Tolerance implies power imbalance between the one who tolerates and the tolerated. Instead of tolerance, policymakers, camp administration, journalists, scholars and practitioners should promote meaningful commitment to matters pertaining to refugees. This would produce a better understanding of different perspectives and thus could lead to the development of common goals and values underlying the necessity of living together. Only holistic approach to forced migration fosters the dimensions of responsibility and reciprocity. This generates the language of mutual respect which makes a shift from structural forms of authority to personal contacts with the refugees. In the African context, the aspect of personal contact with people is valued as a gesture of respect, friendliness and hospitality. The inter-personal contacts with refugees will enhance the humanitarian assistance mission and give the refugees a feeling that somebody is truly interested in them.
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