

MEMORANDUM

to the

House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee

Robert Chambers
Institute of Development Studies
at the University of Sussex

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Mass Distress, Migration and Rural Development in Sub-Saharan Africa

Current terminology does not fit well with the new and tragic realities of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). The word 'refugee' has a technical sense which, strictly speaking, limits it to those who cross international boundaries for reasons of fear and persecution. It can also be used for a single person who flees alone. The phenomenon to be faced now is the mass movement of desperate and destitute people. In this note, MDM will be used for mass distress migration and MD migrant for a person involved. These terms cover a broader spectrum of conditions than the older terms 'refugee influx' and 'refugee', useful though those remain. MDMs occur wherever people move or are moved in distress and en masse in thousands, whether within or between countries, and whatever the immediate cause, whether international or civil war, persecution, expulsion, famine, forcible resettlement, or some combination of these or other disasters or conditions.

MDMs of desperate people in SSA are not new. There have been many during the past three decades, but they have received less publicity and attention internationally than other, smaller movements in other parts of the world. They have occurred both within and between countries. Within countries there have been large-scale movements and resettlement in Angola, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Zaire and Zimbabwe. Between countries, very large numbers of political refugees have been received by Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Gabon, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zaire and Zambia. Large-scale resettlement of refugees returning to their countries of origin has also been undertaken in Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Sudan and Zimbabwe. An ominous development was the 1983 expulsion from Nigeria of over a million non-citizens. Most recently, famine and war have generated the mass migrations from Ethiopia and Chad, and the Ethiopian Government is undertaking a large scale internal relocation of people. All told, over the three decades, and counting only once those who have moved twice or more, at least some ten million people have been involved in such mass movements in SSA. Most of them have been very poor, frightened, destitute, and either starving or on the verge of starvation, and most of the movements have been from low-income rural areas to other low-income rural areas, often remote, and often near national borders.

continuing combination of economic crisis including low and unstable food production, ecological deterioration, population growth (there will be many more people alive to be affected), population and other pressures on resources, and political instability. The proportions of mass economic migrants - those who flee loss of livelihood and destitution can be expected to increase. So can the numbers of political and economic expellees, like those sent away from Nigeria. The proportion, though probably not the absolute numbers, of political refugees who are fleeing war and persecution may decline. Often, though, as with many now leaving Ethiopia, the categories 'economic' and 'political' will both apply. It would not be surprising if, over the next two decades, the numbers of people involved in MDMs exceeded 10 million, and in a grim but not impossible scenario, the number could be as high as 50 million.

The implications include a rethinking of rural development policy and practice in which British aid could play a useful role. Prevention as usual is better than cure. Priorities include family planning and programmes which enable the poorer rural people to gain better and more secure livelihoods where they are and with what they have. Besides extending and improving existing programmes, some promising potentials are presented by agroforestry, including tree fodders for livestock and multi-purpose trees, counterseasonal strategies which concentrate on enabling poorer people to get through the worst times of year without becoming poorer or weaker, and irrigation where it is feasible.

On the 'curative side', as UNHCR and other agencies have recognised, emergency aid to feed MDM populations has to have a strong development thrust from the start. For refugees, this unanimous recommendation of a meeting of experts convened by UNHCR in August 1983 has been generally accepted by the international community. The reasons for treating MD emergencies in a development mode include:

- (i) generating livelihoods. Rural self-settlement and organised agricultural settlement have both become more difficult. Rapid growth of host populations means that less land is available. Ethnic traditions of hospitality have weakened (though Muslim traditions are impressively strong, as shown in Sudan). A higher

livelihoods for MDM migrants are thus increasingly difficult to generate in rural areas in the absence of economic development and diversification.

- (ii) avoiding dependency. The dependency syndrome of apathy and complaint which comes from long reliance on relief is best avoided by enabling the able-bodied to work and become self-sufficient quickly.
- (iii) helping hidden losers. The poorer members of rural host populations can be hidden losers where MD migrants compete with them for work, drive down wages, push up food prices, decimate common property resources such as grazing and firewood, and place extra pressure on services for health and education. Development programmes in influx-affected areas should help the poorer hosts as well as the MD migrants.
- (iv) keeping down costs. Development which enables MD migrants to become self-sufficient reduces the costs of supporting them.
- (v) offsetting the costs to host governments. Large influxes place burdens on the health, education and security services of host government and add to their recurrent budgets. Economic development can produce revenue to offset these costs.
- (vi) maintaining political support. Most African Governments have been liberal in their welcome to MD migrants but domestic economic and political pressures will make their generosity more difficult to sustain. The best guarantee of welcome is labour shortages, but these are becoming less and less likely. However, if accepting a mass influx brings with it substantial additional aid, welcome will be easier to justify.

For these reasons, the international community should support host governments in mounting additional development programmes in MDM-affected areas.

This requires:

but in parallel with relief operations, preparations for development programmes should be started.

- (b) true additionality of aid from donors. If MDM-affected areas receive aid which is diverted from other potential uses by the host countries, there will be justifiable grounds for resentment and opposition. This principle of additionality is vital, and donors should honour it in as explicit and clear a manner as possible.
- (c) the careful and constructive use of food aid. Where possible, it should be used from an early stage to support the creation of infrastructure and other development purposes. Care should be taken that it does not hurt the poorer hosts, including them as recipients where desirable.

Over the next two decades, the British aid programme could have an impact out of proportion to its financial contribution by:

- (i) stressing livelihoods for the poorer in rural development policy and programmes
- (ii) ensuring additionality to host governments for all MDM-related aid
- (iii) providing staff for early reconnaissance of MDM-affected areas to assist host governments identify and draw up development proposals, and then support for implementation
- (iv) giving priority to MDMS which are less visible, politically unattractive to the international community, or otherwise less likely to receive other donor support
- (v) continuing and extending support to international and national voluntary agencies working in MDM-affected areas.