

From Bottom-Up to Top-Down: The ‘Pre-History’ of Refugee Livelihoods Assistance from 1919 to 1979

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This article draws upon grey literature and archival materials to compare and contrast refugee livelihoods assistance in the interwar period (1919–39) and the post-war period (1945–79). It argues that the interwar period featured ‘bottom-up’ policies and practices of the League of Nations, while the post-war period was characterized by technocratic, authoritarian approaches to refugee livelihoods and development by institutions such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Refugee livelihoods were incorporated and accommodated for as a central element of League relief efforts before World War II, but the implementation of similar assistance practices in the following period excluded refugees’ own livelihoods strategies and skills. The article concludes by discussing the relevance of further historical research in Refugee Studies as the current use of the term ‘innovation’ is ahistorical, and many contemporary livelihood practices operating under the auspices of ‘innovation’ have in reality been employed since the beginning of the international refugee regime.

Keywords: Refugee livelihoods, refugee assistance, League of Nations, history in Refugee Studies

Introduction

[T]hrown almost naked on the shores of Greece, [refugees] have displayed such an industrious and active spirit that they are nearly all able today to earn their own livelihood without any help from the Greek Government or any other source.

So reads a 1926 ‘Foreign Affairs’ article detailing the success of the first international institutional response to refugees (Howland 1926: 622–623). Refugees’ ‘morale and their scale of living rise visibly month by month,

and their asset value to Greece increases in proportion to the decrease of their miseries' (*ibid.*). In the face of the protracted refugee situations of today, such a statement seems a dream. Just as remarkable is the under-explored livelihoods promotion discussed, which emerged long before the concept of 'refugee livelihoods' entered the Refugee Studies lexicon. However, in contrast to the concept's contemporary currency, a dearth of historical literature on the topic has led to an ahistorical conceptualization of refugee livelihoods and the assistance surrounding them, reflecting a larger lacuna of historical literature in Refugee Studies² (Crisp 2003: 223).

'Refugee livelihoods', defined by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as the means through which refugees 'secure the basic necessities of life, such as food, water, shelter and clothing' (UNHCR 2014: 7), have been increasingly discussed in the last 15 years as a means to achieve local integration through self-reliance. Despite the term being criticized for lacking a coherent definition (De Vriese 2006: 1), the salience of refugee livelihoods is clear, having emerged as a main topic within debates surrounding rights-based approaches (Crisp 2003), urban support programmes (FIC 2012) and microfinance for refugees (Bartsch 2004; Foy 2006). Between 2000 and 2009, approximately 12,000 pieces of literature by academics and practitioners discussed refugee livelihoods—over double the number published the decade prior (ProQuest 2014). From 2010 to 2012, UNHCR's budget for Livelihood Programming increased by 66 per cent (UNHCR 2012: 14).³

The UNHCR's Livelihoods Unit, only established in 2008, focuses on 'vocational and skills training, promoting entrepreneurship, supporting agriculture, livestock and fisheries, and strengthening access to financial services or microfinance' (UNHCR 2014: 14). These have been labelled 'innovative' in development literature (IFAD 2003; Foy 2006; IRC 2012), yet historical examination reveals that these assistance practices have occurred since the first international institutional responses to refugees by the League of Nations (hereafter, *the League*), in the 1920s. As this article discusses, these practices have remained largely consistent from the 1920s up to today, as have international institutions' and host governments' aims for refugee assistance to lead to both refugee self-sufficiency *and* host country economic development. Further documentation and analysis of this history are important, for gaps in historical knowledge and institutional memory have resulted in an inability to identify true innovations, protracted challenges, and best practices in refugee livelihoods assistance.

In this article, I aim to situate refugee livelihoods assistance in a historical framework by reviewing its 'pre-history' and discussing changes and continuities between 1919 and 1979, as well as varying social, economic and political contexts influencing assistance and perceptions of refugees. Despite similar objectives and practices of refugee assistance throughout this time, the participatory and often successful settlement of refugees occurring in the interwar years did not happen after World War II. I argue that there was a diachronic shift in the structure and implementation of refugee livelihoods

assistance. This changed from a ‘bottom-up’ refugee livelihoods assistance approach during the interwar years to a ‘top-down’, largely authoritarian approach that was solidified after World War II as UNHCR and other development institutions opened operations in Africa. Concomitant with this shift was a changed institutional conceptualization of refugees as workers in need of resettlement to victims in need of comprehensive assistance.

Here, ‘bottom-up’ assistance refers to relief and development efforts built out of and upon the self-defined needs and interests of affected populations, which thus directly engages them in decision-making capacities. Examples of bottom-up strategies that defined the League’s refugee assistance include the incorporation of refugees in higher consultative and representative roles, such as delegates of the Nansen Office, as well as settling refugees in rural or urban areas based on past livelihoods and environs. However, as Skran (1995) discusses, the League’s relief model cannot be defined as refugee-centric, for European representatives still controlled the funding channels and ultimate decision-making processes. The approaches this term encompasses, however, still contrast with the restrictive structures of post-war development projects run by the UN and other institutions. I define these as ‘top-down’, referring to situations of encampment, forced farming and other authoritarian practices that led refugees to have little say in deciding upon or implementing settlement structures, policies or livelihoods programmes.

My time frame is bounded by the formation of the League of Nations in 1919 and the Pan-African Conference on the Situation of Refugees in Africa (Arusha Conference)⁴ in 1979. The League became the first international institutional mechanism to address mass displacement, largely through seeking opportunities for refugees to contribute to host country development. It constitutes the first international refugee regime (Skran 1995) and all further (Western) international responses to displacement, particularly those of the UN, have in some form built off the League’s experience. Dividing history into periods is always a crude endeavour, but the Arusha Conference is an important landmark due to it beginning the International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa (ICARA) ‘process’⁵ occurring in the 1980s (Stein 1997; Crisp 2001; Betts 2004). This process focused on alleviating host country burden-sharing by increasing refugees’ contributions to host country national development and culminated in a ‘new’ strategy called ‘Refugee Aid and Development’ (RAD) that has appeared under other names in the last 25 years.⁶ As RAD is rarely attributed to decades prior to the 1960s (Crisp 2003; Horst 2006), the Arusha Conference is considered the basis for programmes targeting refugee livelihoods through national development (Lui 2008), despite the fact that these had already occurred during the previous 20 years of refugee assistance in Africa (Gorman 1986) and 50 years of European assistance (Skran 1995).

Although assistance practices before and after 1979 were similar, their level of *documentation* was not. Scant academic literature on refugee assistance existed prior to the creation of Refugee Studies in the early 1980s, and the

prolific academic engagement on the linkage between refugee aid and development primarily began after the Arusha Conference (Chambers 1979, 1982; Stein 1982; Gorman 1986). It is not the aim of this article to review the abundant literature focusing on this topic from 1979 onwards, for the history of refugee assistance since the 1980s is well documented.⁷ Instead, as historical enterprises on refugee assistance have rarely expanded to periods preceding the 1980s, my aim is to elucidate the comparatively neglected ‘pre-history’ of refugee livelihoods assistance from the interwar years up to 1979.

Beginning with 1920s Europe and moving to post-colonial East Africa, this article shifts continents much as the refugee regime did, following both refugee flows and the interests of dominant states and institutional actors. In particular, I document the shifting structure and administration of refugee settlement and how refugee livelihoods were addressed by main institutional actors between 1919 and 1979, primarily the League, UNHCR, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO). Refugee assistance is necessarily embedded within larger humanitarian and development events and trends. Varying modes of programme implementation and settlement regulations were not enacted in silos but are instead entwined with changing development agendas, host country policies towards refugees, the interests of international aid agencies such as the League and UNHCR, and emerging international norms regarding the role of states in providing welfare. Refugee livelihoods assistance therefore embodies an important intersection of broader debates concerning the meaning and aims of humanitarian practice, and gaps between emergency relief and rehabilitation and development. Situating it accordingly helps to explain some of its changes.

The first section of this article describes the dominant approach to refugee settlement and livelihoods assistance in the interwar years by the League and ILO. The second section examines assistance practices in the post-war period between 1945 and 1979, primarily discussing the exclusive livelihoods assistance and top-down structure of often jointly led UNHCR, UNDP and ILO settlements created for the ‘new refugees’ in Africa. The final section reviews the changes and consistencies in assistance practices throughout these periods, and discusses the relevance of these findings to current debates on innovation in refugee livelihoods assistance today.

Methods and Sources

Following Arksey and O’Malley (2005), I employed a scoping study methodology for this research to map available literature underpinning the concept of refugee livelihoods and refugee livelihoods assistance between 1919 and 1979.⁸ Scoping studies are often part of a longer process of systematic review and are useful when an undefined amount of evidence exists (Levac *et al.* 2010). When it became clear that relevant historical documentation was present in non-digitized archives, I also examined so-called ‘grey’ literature.

Primary literature consulted includes documents from the League, UN and ILO archives, as well as the University of Oxford Refugee Studies Centre Betts Collection, comprising the formerly classified reports and private documents of Tristram F. Betts, a leading Africanist in the field of refugees in the 1960s and 1970s and former Oxfam Field Director for East Africa. Despite their availability in archives, many of these personal and technical documents by development workers and long-standing institutional entities are non-digitized, and are therefore not easily accessible and have been unexamined for content involving refugee livelihoods. Altogether, a total of 312 items comprising books (38), research articles (129), institutional reports (134) and private documents (11) were collected and examined in the course of the study between August 2013 and June 2014.

Bottom-Up Assistance in the Interwar Period: 1919–39

The League of Nations and Refugees

The establishment of the formal commission on the League of Nations on 25 January 1919 provided an unprecedented basis for international cooperation and oversight as well as the first attempts by an international body to respond to mass displacement. The League was formed with the primary goal of maintaining peace, for the countries comprising it had in many cases been devastated by World War I. With the League's creation, states envisaged a security system to prevent war by increasing international dialogue, accountability and upholding newly drawn state lines, even condoning forced displacement through population exchanges to adhere to these borders.

In 1921, the League of Nations created the High Commission for Refugees (hereafter, *the High Commission*), in part to diminish to the perceived threat of European destabilization posed by displaced people. Approximately nine to 10 million refugees were in Europe during the interwar period (Marrus 1985: 51); those supported by the League included Russians, Greeks, Armenians, Bulgarians, Turks, Saarlaenders and Jewish, mainly German, citizens (Fanshawe and Macartney 1933; Skran 1995: 9). Due to social and political trends, internal funding constraints, and a lack of prior experience in refugee assistance, League assistance strategies emphasized bottom-up methods and refugees' capacity to contribute to independent national commissions and rehabilitation through their own expertise as well as financial means. The promotion of refugee self-sufficiency and professional skills meant that refugees became employed in settlement commissions, served as delegates of the High Commission and even funded other refugees' settlements through microfinance.

The end of World War I and the interwar years constituted a continuous era of humanitarian efforts based on states' developing but still nascent propensity to take responsibility for populations in need and respond through international coordination and organizations (Barnett 2011: 87). Overall, this

period saw an increased role of the state in citizens' lives, a stronger conception of welfare and clearer state obligations to citizens (Barnett 2011). The provision of material assistance to refugees was innovative for the time and 'League initiatives in helping refugees achieve self-sufficiency were a dramatic departure from the past' (Skran 1985: 113). Throughout this era, welfare provision by states was largely unfamiliar, and they maintained an overall ethos of self-reliance for citizens as well as refugees. This was also evidenced within the League; the High Commission, renamed the Nansen International Office for Refugees in the 1930s, had a strict 'no-charity' philosophy and conceptualized refugees as an economic and 'technical' problem with economic solutions⁹ (ILO 1928). This was enabled through the common naturalization of refugees at the time, which significantly reduced barriers to accessing work. The League's doctrine of refugee self-reliance persisted into the 1930s, reflecting the tenets of state non-interference regarding citizen welfare.

The no-charity philosophy of the League also stemmed from the Commission's own financial constraints and its mandate to coordinate rather than implement programmes. Refugees were originally assumed to be an ephemeral phenomenon, and the Commission was only meant to be temporary (LN 1934: 66). The High Commission, and later Nansen Office, had to fight to remain in existence up to the start of World War II (Hansson 1938). Indeed, both offices rarely received more than 1 per cent of the League's budget (Johnson 1938: 207) and thus faced a challenging lack of funding. Due to this and a dearth of prior experience, the League's refugee relief efforts were largely ad hoc trials (Housden 2012: 59), which became increasingly orchestrated in the late 1930s. The initial provisional nature of assistance facilitated accommodating policies regarding refugee livelihoods and self-sufficiency in rehabilitation and settlement efforts.

The Advent of Refugee Aid and Development

When one examines League documents on refugee assistance, it is quickly apparent that main League strategies for peace—supporting refugees and promoting economic and social stabilization—merged through refugee resettlement projects. The League utilized and fostered refugee livelihoods as a means to attain refugee self-sufficiency and the national economic stability of host countries, even to the point of including refugee settlement into national reconstruction schemes (LN 1945: 27). Refugees were regularly employed in large-scale agricultural and government-sponsored public work projects, such as draining marshes and building roads. In this way, they provided desired labour for urban as well as rural development (ILO 1926; Pentzopoulos 2002: 115). Notably, the rural settlements in the 1920s were the first attempts to undertake integrated development programmes that targeted locals as well as refugees, which became known in the 1980s as 'Refugee Aid and Development' and in the 2000s as 'Development Assistance for Refugees'.

The efforts of the first League-sponsored national commission established in a host country, Greece, evince the dominant participatory rehabilitation and development approach to refugee livelihoods at the time. Emblematic of the League's overall approach to assistance, the Greek Refugee Settlement Commission (GRSC) had the sole and immediate aim of settling and fostering the self-reliance of the approximately 1.5 million ethnic Greek refugees forced out of Asia Minor and into Greece between 1922 and 1924. Like later programmes implemented in the 1920s and 1930s, the Commission was forbidden to use funds on relief. The GRSC maintained a close connection to the national government, almost all GRSC staff were Greek and Henry Morgenthau, the first Chairman, stipulated that all posts should be given to Greek refugees (Skran 1985: 179). Due to its success, the GRSC became a model for refugee settlements, replicated in further refugee crises in Bulgaria, Syria and Lebanon. In Bulgaria between 1926 and 1933, for example, approximately 125,000 refugees were established by a national Commission through rural development that included building roads, clearing land and providing refugee farmers with tools and seeds (Skran 1985: 49).

Successful refugee settlements in the interwar period occurred through integrated rural development projects supporting refugee rehabilitation and host country economies through agricultural production (Mears 1929; LN 1933; Skran 1995). In addition to physical labour provided by refugees, development occurred through commissions' provision of new tools and agricultural methods. Of Greece, Mears writes:

Better breeds of livestock are being introduced, and nomadic shepherds are being replaced by stock breeders who raise forage crops on their own land. Fallowing has given place to artificial fertilization, and new tools supplied by the Refugee Settlement Commission are gradually causing the peasants to discard antiquated methods of agriculture (Mears 1929: 279).

For homesteading families, the Commission provided tools, animals and seeds for one year, as well as created infrastructure such as schools, hospitals and model farms that also assisted local Greeks (Skran 1989: 178). A 1933 League pamphlet discusses a colony of 15 villages created to settle 15,000 refugees, mainly farmers. Refugees lived in tents until material to build huts was provided. In addition to farms, cottage industries such as charcoal burning and carpet weaving were created and, by the end of the first year after resettlement, the majority of refugees had become entirely self-reliant (LN 1933: 72–73). Overall, by 1931, 650,000 people (approximately half of the refugees) had been settled and 2,000 agricultural colonies and urban quarters had been built around Greece (Skran 1985: 48).

Although the GRSC emphasized rural development assistance to refugees, a quarter of the budget was devoted to urban settlements, with 'refugees ma[king] up ninety percent of the labour force involved in constructing urban housing' (Skran 1985: 179). Where urban resettlement was an option, relocated urban dwellers had increased opportunities to continue

their past professions and utilize financial and trading skills (Housden 2012: 70). A League report recalling the Greek refugees stated ‘The famous Smyrna carpet industry has now moved bodily, with the men who used to practice it, from Smyrna to the Piraeus’ (LN 1934: 74). In this way, refugee agency was promoted with results that also benefitted Greece’s economy. Due to the success of this approach in Greece, settling refugees in both urban and rural areas became the status quo in countries such as Bulgaria and Lebanon.

The Centrality of Refugee Livelihoods: ‘Employment-Matching’ and Refugee-Funded Microfinance

A main reason accounting for the centrality of refugee livelihoods in resettlement in the 1920s and into the 1930s was the treatment of refugees as labour migrants rather than subjects—or masses—of humanitarian need. Rehabilitation efforts therefore continued to correspond to states’ growing but still limited perception of responsibility towards both nationals and refugees. Although the Greek settlement was considered a success, refugees in countries like Lebanon and Syria struggled to find employment (Migliorino 2008: 75–77); by 1924, it had become clear that the refugee ‘problem’ was not a temporary one and that ‘in the main their problem was to find work, or have it found for them’ (LN 1933: 67). In response, the ILO was incorporated into refugee relief and rehabilitation efforts to address ‘the employment, emigration and settlement of refugees’ (ILO 1928: 68). From 1925 to 1929, ILO facilitated the technical aspects of refugee emigration, including transportation. Its efforts in refugee settlement illustrate the centrality of refugees’ existing livelihoods in assistance strategies, and the dominant perception of refugees as individual workers with specific skill sets. ILO initiated a successful ‘employment-matching scheme’ through asking European countries about their needs for foreign employment in order to place skilled refugees, largely based on their existing livelihoods, into suitable positions. ILO, as well as charities, provided oversight in the resettlement process in an effort to prevent the exploitation of refugees. Fifty thousand refugees, mainly from China and European countries, were employed through this endeavour, which proved both cost-effective and successful in enabling refugee self-reliance (ILO 1928: 84–85). By 1929, ILO had notably reduced the number of able-bodied refugees seeking employment from 400,000 to 200,000 (Skran 1985: 205).

The dominant perception of refugees’ own capability is further seen through their financial contribution to settlement. By the late 1930s, the main source of income for the Nansen Office was provided by refugees themselves through a fee of five gold Francs for the Nansen passport, the identity travel document for refugees designed by Nansen in 1922. With these fees, the so-called Nansen Stamp Fund was created—a revolving fund providing loans to refugees that were repaid as they established themselves (LN 1934: 69). This ultimately ‘formed a nucleus of a humanitarian fund large enough to

help refugees become self-supporting' (Skran 1989: 206). The system of revolving funds was integral to creating Armenian settlements in Syria and Lebanon, and money donated to the settlements was loaned to refugees with a high success rate of repayment (Skran 1995: 181–182). In the 1930s, small loans to establish businesses such as restaurants and shops were also granted to refugees through the revolving fund. In this way, refugees' successful livelihoods creation enabled through the Nansen Stamp Fund provided the funding for further refugee rehabilitation.

Restrictionism and Technocratic Undertones in the 1930s

The High Commission and Nansen Office's coordination and utilization of refugees' skills and funds were in many cases pivotal to successful refugee settlement, yet economic and political climates played a large role in refugees' ability to establish themselves—or emigrate at all. States' increasing restrictionism and wariness to engage with international problems in the 1930s was a result of both the global recession and war preparations. These had the effect of reducing resettlement options as well as employment positions for refugees within the Nansen Office. Partly in response to this restrictionism, humanitarianism in the later 1930s shifted from serving identity groups to offering aid based on need to vulnerable populations (Barnett 2011: 94). This shift occurred alongside the professionalization of humanitarianism and growing technocratic and top-down means of rehabilitating refugees. In contrast to the 1920s, refugees in the 1930s were gradually excluded from holding decision-making or practical roles in settlement implementation. In 1938, Michael Hansson, president of the Nansen Office, discussed replacing refugee workers with foreign employees, stating:

There is no denying the great advantage that has been derived from the employment of refugees themselves as collaborators in the countries where the Nansen Office has been obliged to maintain representatives But should it prove necessary, or desirable, there is no reason why non-refugees should not be employed as widely as possible, wherever of course people be found who are willing to devote themselves to this work (Hansson 1938: 25–26).

Despite such suggestions, seemingly angled to increase non-refugee employment opportunities in an increasingly austere European environment, the League lamented refugees' lack of opportunity for foreign employment. In the same speech, President Hansson stated 'Under these changed conditions it has proved impossible to solve the refugee problem which, to a large extent, is an economic problem' (Hansson 1938: 15–16). While in some senses accurate, the League had also striven to remain apolitical in refugee affairs, and continued to construe refugees as an economic problem with an economic solution, even in the face of the discriminatory causes of German Jewish displacement (McDonald *et al.* 2007).

To combat virulent European restrictionism, the League proposed 'solutions' to refugee settlement outside of Europe. These included a League resettlement scheme in Latin and South American countries with sufficient employment opportunities, to be partially coordinated by the ILO (ILO 1928; Inman 1939). In Paraguay, for example, 'a Colony bearing Nansen's name [was] established with the support of the Government and under the supervision of a Swiss landowner' (Hansson 1938: 9). Although few such schemes were ever implemented, a 1939 review of suitable countries included Brazil, Venezuela and Chile due to their vast land resources. Rural 'pioneering' was proffered for refugees with agricultural backgrounds to combat population rise in already overcrowded cities:

Take a great part of the interior of Brazil, Venezuela, Colombia, or some other suitable section; move in with modern machinery and medicine; clear off the land, drain the swamps, bridge the streams; build settlements, initiate farming, cattle raising, and industrial activities. Let hardy refugees themselves... be important participants in the enterprise. The remarkable accomplishments of Henry Ford in building a modern industrial community away up in the interior of Brazil in the Amazon jungle shows the possibility of such a dream (Inman 1939: 193).

These plans exemplify the broader intellectual and institutional shifts that began even before World War II and greatly influenced conceptions of and support for refugee assistance. The suggestion of a 'made to order' community (ibid.) demonstrates a heightened regard for science, technology and planning in language that portends the post-war discourse of development. In this way, the interwar years, although distinct in many of its responses to refugees, also incubated practices that defined the following era.

Despite their ad hoc nature, the interwar years saw the emergence of not only the first international refugee regime, but a *participatory* refugee regime with the joint aims of refugee self-reliance and host country development. League-sponsored resettlement commissions in the 1920s and 1930s are powerful examples of the first international bodies attempting to deal 'systematically, and along international lines' with displaced populations (Macartney 1930: 5). Innovative rehabilitation strategies included material assistance while emphasizing bottom-up methods and refugees' ability to contribute through their own skills, expertise and financial means. A variety of factors contributed to this inclusive approach, including the League's own funding constraints, the common host state policy of naturalizing refugees and an overall context of limited government welfare intervention. Refugees were conceptualized as economic immigrants, which at different times enabled and hindered the support they received. This fluctuating assistance demonstrates the importance of exogenous factors such as changing global economic contexts in achieving resettlement and refugee self-sufficiency. Reflecting broader humanitarian shifts, the conception of refugees as workers began to change in the 1930s as refugee settlement was cast as a humanitarian

imperative towards vulnerable groups. This corresponded to the gradual surpassing of the role of refugees in their own relief by foreign employees within increasingly planned settlement schemes. Throughout this period, the League and the ILO gained important experience that was built upon after World War II. The start of the war in 1939 brought a virtual halt to refugee assistance, yet the post-war years saw a dramatic departure from the bottom-up, no-charity philosophy that had once defined the main international institution's response to refugees.

Post-War Top-Down Assistance: 1945–79

After World War II ended, and throughout the rest of the 1940s and early 1950s, the Allies concentrated efforts on repatriating or resettling the 10 to 12 million displaced persons (DPs) scattered across Europe. In 1951, UNHCR superseded the International Refugee Organisation (IRO) and United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), which had originally addressed war-related European displacement. Both the successes and the failures of the League of Nations, which dissolved in 1946, paved the way for the UN, an international institution more structured, influential and broader in scope than the League had ever been. Barnett (2011) cites a paternalism present within both the interwar and post-war years, which became prominent as humanitarian organizations advanced into bureaucratized, permanent entities and those such as UNHCR expanded from emergency response to the 'development' of both vulnerable national and refugee populations. This shift coincided with the exclusion of refugees from employment within the very institutions mandated to serve them, as well as with the creation of top-down assistance programmes by 'experts' who had little knowledge of the regions they worked in (Betts Collection 1971–76). After World War II, the implementation of institutional livelihoods assistance changed, as did the discourse surrounding assistance programmes. Strategies promoting refugee livelihoods became infused with the broader political and intellectual thoughts of a post-war development order focused on 'progress', defined by Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the introduction of new populations into liberal economies. However, the goal for refugee settlements to contribute to national development through self-sufficient refugee livelihoods remained.

In interesting contrast to the requirement for refugees to contribute to their host country's economic progress, there was a change from the perception of refugees as economic migrants to victims in need of protection. Building on the trend that had emerged before the war, organizations increased humanitarian aid on the basis of need and protection, rather than identity and employable skills. Long (2013: 13–15) discusses this shifting conceptualization of refugee resettlement as concretized through those refugees who did not meet migration criteria due to illness or age, and remained in DP camps after World War II. Indeed, by the time the so-called 'last million' were resettled

in the 1950s, the resettlement of refugees as workers had become the exception rather than the norm.

Several macro-structural social and geographic factors account for this shift in perception and practice. Western states became more involved in citizens' welfare and economic wellbeing after the war, as institutional and state assistance in general increased significantly, furthering what Barnett (2011: 99) cites as a 'shift from state-as-night-watchman to the state-as-caretaker'. Wider international assistance reflected heightened 'international responsibility' and states' focus on a 'common humanity' and 'international community' (Barnett 2011), with the aim of advancing international cooperation based on mutual interests. The 'development project' was integral to this and also significantly accounted for the construction of refugees as beneficiaries rather than active participants in their resettlement. As refugee assistance moved into Africa and other newly independent countries, organizations such as UNHCR entered (post-)colonial landscapes of humanitarianism and domination that greatly influenced the implementation of livelihoods schemes and settlements.¹⁰ In the process, the structure of refugee assistance changed from the interwar years' institutional accommodation and reliance on refugee livelihoods to the authorization of restrictive livelihoods measures in the name of the broader post-war goals of development.

The Incorporation of Refugees into the 'Development Project'

Refugee livelihoods projects increased globally with the expansion of international organizations, state welfare and increased development funding attributed to a larger pattern of intervention to promote economic stability and peace in developing countries. By the 1960s, the first UN Development Decade, development was viewed 'not simply [as] an increase in productive capacity but major transformations in [developing countries'] social and economic structures' (UN 1970: 5). The dominant role of the United States in the UN, as well as the presence of American institutions such as the Ford Foundation in the expanding area of development, meant that Western development policy was largely shaped by American intellectual thought and political aims, often in response to the Cold War. In this way, development as a planned enterprise, including assistance to refugees, became a political tool for host and donor states (Loescher and Scanlan 1986; Sachs 1992: 2). This instrumentalization extended to assistance institutions like UNHCR, which needed to expand in order to survive. By capitalizing on development funding to increase refugee assistance, UNHCR grew from an institution solely focused on relief to an agency that contributed to the UN's aims of assisting countries' modernization and development (Loescher 2001). Similarly, ILO expanded its aim and purposes to include technical and administrative responsibility (ILO 1944), and in the 1950s became increasingly involved in development projects across the globe (Guthrie 2013).

The transformative aim of development became more predominant in refugee assistance during the 1960s, as evidenced through UNHCR's African refugee settlements, formed in response to the 'new refugees' resulting from wars of decolonization. Although the aims and practices of refugee livelihoods assistance mirrored those of the interwar years, settlement and project implementation differed drastically. Main assistance practices, such as agricultural production and vocational training in settlements, continued, yet occurred with little emphasis on accommodating or promoting the existing livelihoods strategies of refugees. The ultimate aim of settlements was to improve host country economies as part of the larger 'project' of development, which led to administrative structures that excluded refugees. 'Self-sufficient' refugee settlements were to be fostered through viable refugee livelihoods—mainly the strictly regulated cultivation of cash crops for national exportation. This was primarily achieved through block, monoculture farming, which created both social and practical problems (ICVA 1969: 1; Betts Collection 1971–76; RPG 1985). Host country policies contributed to refugees' inability to govern their own livelihoods, as naturalization and the right to work were often restricted (Stein 1990: 2). Bitter about what they perceived as unequal burden-sharing by donor states, host countries also promoted policies of encampment due to the flow of aid that such settlements received, as well as the often accurate fear that refugees posed a security risk through spillover conflicts and struggles over resources with host populations (RPG 1985).

Zonal Development, Foreign 'Experts' and the Exclusion of Refugees

Initially, UNHCR programmes targeted refugee self-reliance by offering land, tools and seeds—a strategy known as basic minimal assistance. Programmes were initially hands-off and in this way similar to those implemented by the League. However, this assistance rarely led to economic self-sufficiency (Stein 1990: 13; Loescher 2001: 122), and the programmes that replaced it became drastically more regulated. In the 1960s, UNHCR proponents of greater assistance such as the UN High Commissioner Felix Schnyder, advocated for a comprehensive development approach that included local host communities and contributed to host country economies. Known as 'zonal development', this was in essence a repackaging of livelihoods programmes from the interwar years. Discussing rehabilitation projects, one report states:

[T]he objective is not merely to offer refugees the possibility of earning their daily bread. These projects must aim further and be integrated into national development programmes. The Governments make available to the refugees the land, agricultural tools, seed and fertilisers (Betts Collection 1967c: Box 15, General Work, Afr/Ref/Conf./No. 17:5).

Zonal development targeted both refugee and host populations, and included the building of roads, schools and health facilities. The ambit of refugee assistance and self-sufficiency therefore continued to include infrastructure

development for entire areas hosting refugee settlements, now modelled partly on the World Bank's integrated rural development settlements (Loescher 2001: 122).

By the late 1960s in East Africa, foreign workers were almost solely directing and implementing refugee rehabilitation, in stark contrast to the former role of refugees and host country nationals in these matters. Africans were not employed within UNHCR in the 1960s and the agency's organizational partners had little prior experience in Africa (Loescher 2001: 119). A variety of social and economic factors account for this institutional structure. Just as the recession in the 1930s led to the engagement of more foreign non-refugee employees in refugee relief, the 1960 recession affected the refugee regime similarly. Indeed, a report from the 1967 Conference on the Legal, Economic and Social Aspects of African Refugee Problems convened in Addis Ababa (the Addis Ababa Conference) stated 'every State is anxious to safeguard its employment market As a result, states have been known to employ European expatriate staff on contract basis, rather than African refugees' (Betts Collection 1967b: Box no. 15, General Work: 12). Eriksson *et al.* (1981: 29) echoed this, also noting that African governments preferred to employ foreign experts instead of refugees, as their salaries were frequently paid through development assistance programmes.

The dearth of refugees and local experts involved in settlement structures drastically impacted the mandated livelihoods practices employed, and led to a variety of social and practical problems (RPG 1985: 99). Due to ignorance and a lack of site planning, plots were often too small for more than subsistence farming and officials disregarded both important preliminary soil quality surveys and necessary planting times (Betts Collection 1971–76). Innovative and ultimately destructive technologies such as bulldozers impeded successful crop production through scraping away rich topsoil, leading only cassava to grow (Feldman 1971: 2). Despite multiple reports of 'land exhaustion' (IORD 1971: 11) in various settlements, a main focus remained on cultivating cash crops such as tobacco and improving means of agricultural production. A 1971 settlement assessment states:

The more general conclusion is that *the potential of the agricultural infrastructure has not been effectively utilised. This is mainly because of a lack of experience of those controlling them, and the inadequate information provided. . . .* In retrospect, it does appear that a large amount of the settlements' infrastructure and therefore the 'cost' of settling the refugees, can be primarily explained in terms of the capital support needed to maintain project staff. *Their limited technical expertise, and their limited access to technical information available locally has meant that there have been few long term benefits from such expenditures* (Feldman 1971: 5, emphasis added).

This top-down authority and lack of expertise were accompanied by an absence of communication with refugees and locals and the virtual suppression of refugee agency from decision-making and implementation roles.

Refugees were not employees or delegates of organizations such as UNHCR but instead mere ‘beneficiaries’. Settlements became sites for community and rural development projects led by a myriad of international organizations including ILO, UNDP and members of the International Council of Voluntary Organisations (ICVA), which often worked in tandem to achieve their aims. However, a 1967 overview of the work of 20 organizations comprising the ICVA demonstrated little focus on livelihoods activities, but instead on the administration of food and medicine and the promotion of basic education (Betts Collection 1967a: Box 15, General Work, Afr/Ref/Conf. 1967/No. 13). Few microfinance programmes were implemented; the funding of those that were came from international donors through aid agencies instead of from refugees themselves (IORD 1971). The few livelihood-focused projects invested in cash crops as the main means to self-sufficiency, demonstrating institutions’ and host states’ main focus of integrating refugees into national economies (Betts Collection 1967a: Box 15, General Work, Afr/Ref/Conf. 1967/No. 13). Alternative settlement livelihoods schemes such as co-operative shops were largely run by camp staff and thus could not rightfully be seen as refugee enterprises (Morsink 1971: 5).

An authoritarian settlement approach was widespread by 1970, when a total of 57 countries implemented projects through the UNHCR Material Assistance Programme, many focused on self-reliance and jointly led with ILO and UNDP (UNHCR 1970). The administration of the Rutamba Settlement in Tanzania, established in 1965, is representative of top-down post-war refugee livelihoods assistance. Supported by UNHCR and the Lutheran World Federation, in 1967, the settlement held 8,000 refugees struggling to become self-sufficient (ICVA 1967). Although refugee settlement leaders were elected, they wielded no true power. Of Rutamba, Trappe writes:

There is no participation by refugees in the management of the Settlement. The sixty-five ‘leaders’ play only a rather passive role in the organisation . . . The Settlement Commandant and his staff . . . adopt the system of pure direction from above (Trappe 1971: 2).

High Commissioner Khan’s calls in the 1960s and 1970s to increase the availability of skilled training and positions for refugees in both African and non-African countries was largely unsuccessful. Instead, vocational programmes and settlement classes, ostensibly to teach skills to enable self-reliance, ultimately contributed to perpetuating power disparities between refugees and settlement staff. Foreign-led ‘Settlement Community Development Programmes’ were instituted to teach and train refugees according to designated methods. At the Rutamba Settlement, these programmes included:

[O]fficial urging . . . to engage in certain types of agriculture and in block farming, or to introduce certain kinds of crops; ‘softer’ methods used include

‘classes’ and ‘clubs’ for women and youth and to a lesser extent demonstrations, for instance, of food preparation (Trappe 1971: 7).

Such directive programmes corresponded to stringent regulations surrounding refugees’ own livelihood practices. Some of these rules were host country policies, such as the prohibition of refugee marketing organizations in Tanzania. This resulted in a dependency on outside co-operative societies to buy their crops and an attendant lack of refugee ownership over their source of income; as one settlement impact assessor remarked, ‘As the refugee farmers were not able to join these societies so they were unable to exert any pressure on the societies to provide them with an adequate service’ (Morsink 1971: 5). Many other harmful policies, however, came from within the settlements themselves (RPG 1985). Overwhelmingly negative reports of East African refugee settlements in Burundi, Rwanda and Tanzania between 1971 and 1976 cite a highly authoritarian administration that restricted refugees’ livelihoods strategies and the overall effectiveness of rural development plans (Betts Collection 1971–76). Refugees were not only discouraged, but actively punished for having any livelihood other than an institutionally mandated one—usually farming. Refugees at Rutamba were originally intended to grow cashew nuts as the main cash crop, but this expanded to others in an effort to raise refugees above the subsistence level. However:

Most [refugee] farmers questioned said they were prevented by the settlement authorities from extending their fishing activities. The main rationale behind discouraging fishing is the desire to maximise the cultivated area of the settlement. Fishing... is tolerated only if it does not interfere with the agricultural projects. The use of coercion is considered normal, and *refugees are put into prison if they fail to provide expected labour requirements for projects* such as the establishment this year of 400 acres of block farms to grow more rice, beans and cassava (Trappe 1971: 10, emphasis added).

Due in part to harsh prohibitions and regulations, a common strategy of refugees included leaving settlements to find work (Betts 1969; UNHCR 1970). A 1970 ICVA report cites a growing ‘exodus of refugees from the settlements’, noting with concern reasons such as interior politics, poor agricultural conditions and high taxation (ICVA 1970: 2). Many of the settlements that eventually became self-sufficient experienced a dramatic decline in population before becoming stable (RPG 1985; Stein 1990). However, in contrast to the interwar years, refugees were no longer settled in urban or rural areas best suited to their background and skills, but in cases were forcibly removed from the ‘spontaneous’ settlements they had created and instead brought to organized, planned settlements.

Out of the 117 settlements established in Africa, UNHCR declared only 30 of these self-sufficient between 1966 and 1982 (Stein 1990: 3). Of these, 21 received renewed aid in this period, and eight enough aid to make their true self-sufficiency debatable (RPG 1985: 80; Stein 1990: 3). However, despite the

failings of many settlements and documented negative effects of authoritarian administration, the main recommendations of the Arusha Conference, convened in 1979 to address the refugee ‘problem’ in Africa, were for agricultural development programmes and vocational training according to the needs of the host government (Regional Refugee Instruments & Related 1979: paras 1b, 3c). The ‘effective involvement of refugees in the integration and development process’ (*ibid.*: para. 3d) was recommended, yet it was the ‘officials administering refugee affairs’ that were encouraged to develop best practices for refugee self-reliance (*ibid.*: para. 4). These recommendations, therefore, were simply reiterations of practices already in place and did not acknowledge the role that those ‘officials’ played in the emerging status quo of settlement dependency. They furthermore served as a basis for the livelihoods programmes encompassed within RAD and later initiatives. It is in this top-down way, despite the increased emphasis on post-development and the participatory chassis, that refugee livelihoods continued to be addressed in programmes and settlements led by main institutions such as UNHCR, ILO and UNDP throughout the 1980s—and up to today.

Discussion: From Bottom-Up to Top-Down to Today

My findings demonstrate that refugee livelihoods assistance between 1919 and 1979 was bottom-up and largely ad hoc during the interwar years yet became part of top-down, technocratic development efforts after World War II. Refugee livelihoods played a central role in refugee assistance in the decades prior, exemplified through the employment of refugees in the High Commission for Refugees and Nansen Office, refugee funding of the Nansen Stamp Fund, ILO’s employment-matching scheme and efforts to place refugees in urban or rural areas based on past livelihoods. After World War II, refugee livelihoods, and thus the role of refugees themselves, became ancillary, with the predominant focus on host country development. Refugees were forced onto agricultural settlements that implemented block farming for cash crops, and were incarcerated if found engaging in alternative livelihoods. In this way, the international refugee regime changed from inclusive towards refugees to largely exclusive. While the interwar era not only invited but indeed necessitated the role of refugees as active participants in their own livelihoods creation, in both entrepreneurial and organizational capacities, the period after only passively involved refugees. Concomitant with this was the reconceptualization of refugees from capable workers to members of a vulnerable population. In both eras, however, there were multi-pronged efforts to rehabilitate refugees while simultaneously boosting host countries’ infrastructure and economic development. The aims of refugee self-reliance and national development have therefore remained consistent throughout the history of the international refugee regime, although the means have changed.

This article has highlighted similarities and differences in refugee livelihoods assistance throughout a history that is commonly seen as beginning 35 years instead of nearly a century ago. When viewed in conjunction with contemporary assistance practices, these findings invite reflection on the relevance of history to current discussions on ‘innovation’, another concept that has recently gained traction in the humanitarian arena and is often considered a blindly used buzzword (Ramalingam 2013). Although innovation by way of adaptation to new situations and emerging technologies is present within refugee assistance, the purview of this history suggests that innovation in the case of refugee livelihoods assistance largely does not refer to new creations. Instead, this archival research reveals that contemporary practices have been employed, often successfully, since the 1920s. It is instead their structure and implementation that have changed. The evolution of terms, such as the contemporaneous ‘microfinance’ instead of ‘revolving funds’, demonstrates more of a repackaging than the truly novel innovation of these practices. An alternative definition of innovation as old methods enacted in a new way or context may instead be most useful in efforts to improve current livelihoods assistance. However, in order for this to be substantiated, awareness of what has or has not already occurred in the past and with which results is necessary.

Zonal development is a fitting example of the reincarnation of past refugee aid and development programmes that have occurred throughout the history of the international refugee regime. Sometimes, these have been obscured by discursive changes, such as from the 1920s ‘rehabilitation’ to the 1960s ‘animation’ of refugees, yet strategies virtually identical to zonal development appeared under other names in the 1980s and more recent decades. However, zonal development has been largely forgotten and these later programmes remain largely ascribed to the aforementioned 1979 Arusha Conference. Examining where ‘innovative’ solutions are needed in refugee assistance with knowledge of this history is important, for, in cases, the failed rural settlements of the 1960s and 1970s have become the refugee camps of today, with many persisting practical challenges. Ongoing problems include inadequate planning for refugee camps, such as lack of soil testing, and a disregard for refugees’ own methods of livelihoods creation. Kaiser’s (2006) examination of long-term Sudanese refugees in Uganda, for example, discusses problems of soil quality and inadequate settlement plot size—precisely the same issues as reported by Betts on the same population in 1960s Uganda (Betts 1969). In 2010, UNHCR cited ‘lack of early planning’ as a major issue in responding to displacement (2010: 7), echoing discussions and disappointing results from previous decades.

Reflecting on older African settlements, a 1985 Refugee Policy Group report stated ‘Refugee participation may be the concept with the worst ratio of rhetoric to reality in the entire refugee assistance system’ (RPG 1985: 104). The relevance of this statement to livelihoods assistance today makes it important to question how innovation within the sector addresses

the abiding lack of affected community participation. Despite a contemporary emphasis on participatory approaches within refugee assistance, innovation has largely meant looking *outside* of affected communities for problem-solving as well as focusing on product creation and ‘new’ initiatives, instead of evaluating and adjusting the structures through which assistance is provided (Betts and Bloom 2013). Although focused on fostering refugee self-reliance, collaborative efforts such as the Transitional Solutions Initiative, led by UNHCR, UNDP and the World Bank, maintain the status quo of providing products and programmes *for* and not truly *with* refugees (UNDP–UNHCR 2013). The UNHCR Innovation Initiative, launched in 2012, promotes livelihoods and self-reliance (under the theme of ‘Work’), yet its core partnerships lie with the private sector, academia and agency staff (UNHCR 2013). Similarly, UNHCR’s 2014–2018 Global Strategy for Livelihoods aims to promote affected communities’ rights of work and development through participation, yet nowhere states refugees or other displaced people as potential partners in these endeavours (UNHCR 2014). In this way, despite a discourse of refugee capability in UNHCR’s Livelihoods and Self-Reliance Unit, programme implementation is reminiscent of post-war administration in that it is still driven by actors other than refugees themselves. The current rhetoric of refugee agency is important, but has yet to be actualized within the institutional implementation of assistance, and participatory and inclusive approaches remain underemployed (Betts and Bloom 2013: 3).

Extant gaps in historical knowledge and institutional memory result in an inability to identify true innovations or best practices in refugee livelihoods assistance. Similarly, these gaps occlude knowledge of protracted challenges in camp administration and programme implementation where change would be most beneficial. More comprehensive knowledge of historical refugee assistance diminishes the critiqued ahistoricity of Refugee Studies and also offers opportunities for the critical examination of discourse and practice in refugee aid and development. Analysing the longer history of refugee livelihoods assistance in particular offers insight into the administration design that better enabled successful refugee self-reliance in the past, and the construction of refugees that accompanied it; the interwar years specifically present pathways to learn from where ‘beneficiary’ participation and national economic development intersected with mutual benefit to both refugees and host states. The long-standing practical and social issues highlighted here continue to negatively affect refugee assistance and point towards areas in need of different approaches. Most significant is a change from the bottom-up to top-down *administration* and *implementation* of agricultural settlements, vocational training, and microfinance and income-generating projects that persist today. These findings warrant not only more comprehensive historical research, but a closer examination of current efforts that may be termed ‘innovative’, for this research suggests that the *structure* of livelihoods assistance needs more attention than *what* is being provided—findings relevant for broader consideration in both policy and practice. Indeed, focusing on

refugee livelihoods with this understanding—a potential that further historical examination provides—may be one of the most innovative forms of assistance offered yet.

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1. The initial research for this project was undertaken as assistance work for the Humanitarian Innovation Project from August - September 2013.
2. It is, however, erroneous to consider Refugee Studies entirely ahistorical. In addition to later literature, academic works published in the first half of the twentieth century (Mears 1929; Simpson 1939; Vernant 1953; Holborn 1956) provide important information regarding dominant perceptions of refugees and offer detailed and immediate accounts of the international responses they elicited.
3. The budget covered 79 countries and increased from 120 to 200 million (UNHCR 2012: 14).
4. The Arusha Conference brought to the fore many of the long-standing issues of refugee settlement, including the unequal burden-sharing of African countries and the struggle for integrated, self-reliant refugee settlements in host countries.
5. The ICARA Process also comprised the 1980 International Conference on Refugees in The Sudan, the 1981 and 1984 ICARA Conferences and the resulting strategy of 'Refugee Aid and Development' (RAD) (Stein 1997; Betts 2004).
6. Reincarnations of RAD appear in more recent programmes, including 'Targeted Development Assistance' within Convention Plus, a series of broader, more ambitious UNHCR Initiatives from 2002 to 2006 aiming to create international agreements on burden-sharing (Betts 2004), and the 'Transitional Solutions' Initiative, developed in 2010, which seeks to bring 'displacement' onto the development agenda through area-based interventions (UNHCR 2010).
7. The historical research in existence on, for example, past efforts aimed at integration (Crisp 2004), repatriation (Stein 1981; Crisp 1984; Rogge 1985; Crisp 1986; Stein *et al.* 1991; Cuny and Stein 1992; Chimni 2004), and international conferences and initiatives (Gorman 1985, 1993, 1994; Betts and Durieux 2007; Betts 2008, 2009) provide opportunities to learn more about past refugee livelihoods assistance.
8. I identified relevant primary literature in a series of iterative waves from July to September 2013 using Social Science Citation Index (SSCI), Social Science Research Network, Applied Social Sciences Index & Abstracts (ASSIA), Labordoc and the Campbell Library, supplemented by Google Scholar searches. Initially retrieved studies prompted further searches of bibliographies, which in turn generated more relevant literature. I initially screened each piece of literature on keywords, title and, if available, an abstract. Relevant studies were then obtained, charted, tagged with keywords and stored in an electronic database. Full search terms were: Refugee AND Business development, Economic activities, Economic capacities, Enterprise/enterprise development, Entrepreneurs,

- Employment-generating projects, Employment promotion/creation, Income-generation/-generating activities, Livelihoods, Rehabilitation, Self-employment, Self-Reliance, Self-sufficiency.
9. For the protection concerns this created, see Long, K. (2013) 'When Refugees Stopped Being Migrants: Movement, Labour and Humanitarian Protection'. *Migration Studies* 1(1): 4–26.
 10. It is beyond the scope of this article to identify direct corollaries between colonial and post-colonial livelihoods assistance and development structures, yet strong critical analyses discussing the effects of colonialism on humanitarianism exist (see Barnett and Weiss 2008; Chimni 2009) and further research specifically focused on refugee livelihoods assistance is a worthwhile and needed endeavour.

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