



SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND  
HUMANITARIAN COMMITTEE  
**BACKGROUND GUIDE**  
VANCOUVER MODEL UNITED NATIONS  
*~ the 13th annual conference ~*





# VANCOUVER MODEL UNITED NATIONS

*The 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference ♦ February 14-16, 2014*

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Dear Delegates,

My name is Omar Salemhamed, and I am most honored to serve as your Director for the Social, Cultural and Humanitarian Affairs (SOCHUM) Committee at VMUN 2014. I am currently a Grade 11 student at Mulgrave School with a sincere affection for world affairs and the world of politics. While I'm fairly new to MUN, my involvement with and devout passion for debate have helped me prepare for this session. It is my hope that this background guide will provide you with at least a basic understanding of this year's two very complex topics. While I have done my best to provide detailed information and analysis of both topics, in the end it comes down to you to make the decisions; "Diplomacy is not a spectator sport."

The topic selection aspect of my duty was by far the most difficult, as the SOCHUM mandate encompasses and targets a diverse range of issues. My goal was to select a topic that was general enough to affect multiple nations yet still structured enough so that specific solutions could be found. In the end, the topics selected this year by the SOCHUM staff and I are Transboundary Water Affairs, and Conditions in Refugee Camps. Both topics can be approached in several ways; however, determining appropriate and effective solutions to these issues will require a great degree of research.

Transboundary water affairs are often not considered to be globally pressing issues that require immediate attention. Yet with over a billion people lacking access to safe water and with the consequences of water depletion in mind, transboundary water affairs cannot be ignored in the 21st century. Simultaneously, conditions in refugee camps are exponentially deteriorating while civil wars continue to plague nations such as Syria and Somalia, only increasing the global number of refugees. In short, both issues are highly controversial and deserve immediate attention.

I hope you will not hesitate to email me or the other members of the SOCHUM staff if you require any assistance whatsoever.

Best Regards,

Omar Salemhamed

Director: Social, Cultural, and Humanitarian Committee

## **Position Paper Policy**

### **What is a Position Paper?**

A position paper is a brief overview of a country's stance on the topics being discussed by a particular committee. Though there is no specific format the position paper must follow, it should include a description of your positions your country holds on the issues on the agenda, relevant actions that your country has taken, and potential solutions that your country would support.

At Vancouver Model United Nations, delegates should write a position paper for each of the committee's topics. Each position paper should not exceed one page, and should all be combined into a single document per delegate.

For the Social, Cultural, and Humanitarian Committee, position papers are optional but recommended.

### **Formatting**

Position papers should:

- Include the name of the delegate, his/her country, and the committee
- Be in a standard font (e.g. Times New Roman) with a 12-point font size and 1-inch document margins
- Not include illustrations, diagrams, decorations, national symbols, watermarks, or page borders
- Include citations and a bibliography, in any format, giving due credit to the sources used in research (not included in the 1-page limit)

### **Due Dates and Submission Procedure**

Position papers for this committee must be submitted by midnight on January 24, 2014.

Once your position paper is complete, please save the file as *your last name, your first name* and send it as an attachment in an email, to your committee's email address, with the subject heading as *your last name, your first name — Position Paper*. Please do not add any other attachments to the email or write anything else in the body.

Both your position papers should be combined into a single PDF or Word document file; position papers submitted in another format will not be accepted.

Each position paper will be manually reviewed and considered for the Best Position Paper award.

The email address for this committee is [sochum@vmun.com](mailto:sochum@vmun.com).

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## Topic A: Transboundary Water Affairs

### Introduction

Water is one of humankind's most essential resources. As the global community moves into a new era of consumerism, our reliance on fresh water has never been greater. More than one billion people lack access to safe water supplies, more than three billion do not have access to adequate sanitation, and approximately five to ten million people die each year from water-related diseases or inadequate sanitation<sup>1</sup>.

As groundwater levels continued to decline, water demand is increasing. Surface water supplies are becoming increasingly contaminated, and treatment infrastructure is becoming increasingly outdated. Such disparity has naturally given rise to social tension. Water disputes have arisen as a result of ignorance of both water quantity and quality. These issues represent the necessity for considering the security implications of water resource management.

Around the globe, many countries rely on fresh water lakes, aquifers, and reserves that are transboundary in nature – that is, they cross at least one political boundary on the local, national, or international level. Many third world countries are reliant on accessible and healthy water supplies in order to treat diseases and sustain life. However an issue that has caused much tension for hundreds of years is transboundary water conflict.

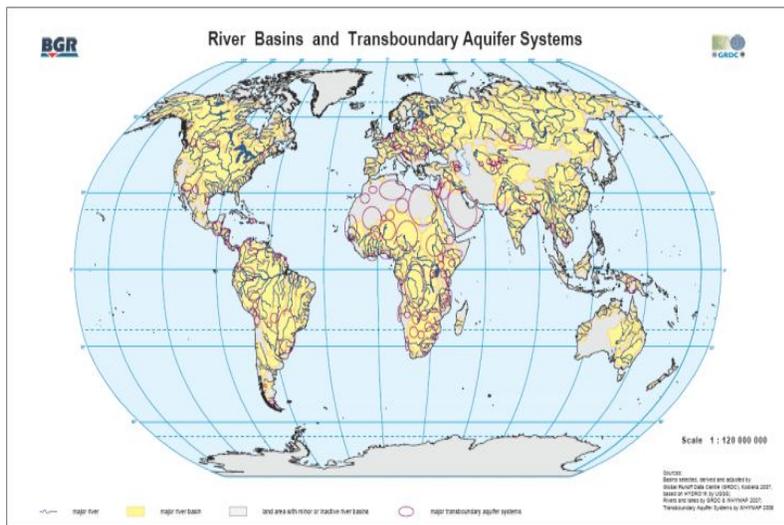


Figure 1 - source: BGR & GRDC

to humanitarian affairs as well as social development. Under the fourth article of the UN Charter, SOCHUM considers “any questions relating to the maintenance of international peace and security brought before it by any member of the United Nations or the Security Council.” Transboundary affairs have long since complicated the achievement of both domestic and international peace around the world. Furthermore the UN recently adopted the “Sanitation for All” resolution in which the assembly strongly

There are around 263 rivers around the globe that are transboundary, and an untold number of international groundwater aquifers.<sup>2</sup> “Within each international basin, demands from environmental, domestic, and economic users increase annually, while the amount of freshwater in the world remains roughly the same as it has been throughout history. Given the scope of the problems and the resources available to address them, avoiding water conflict is vital.”<sup>3</sup>

SOCHUM was created by the UN in order to deal with issues pertaining

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.unwater.org/statistics.html>

<sup>2</sup> Water Without Borders. Background. United Nations Department of Public Information, 2004

<sup>3</sup> “Jarvis, T., M. Giordano, S. Puri, K. Matsumoto, and A. Wolf. “International Borders, Ground Water Flow, and Hydroschizophrenia.” *Ground Water*. Vol. 43 #5, Sept.-Oct. 2005.,

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encourages member states and other relevant parties to implement policies that increase access to sanitation among the poor.<sup>4</sup> Finally, with regards to the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), target 7C commits to “halve, by 2015, the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation.”<sup>5</sup> Essentially it is one of the primary roles of the SOCHUM to foresee that all aforementioned goals are both considered and carried out.

## Timeline

1940-1945	Hydroelectric dams are routinely bombed as strategic targets during World War II.
1947	The Ganges River is partitioned between India and Bangladesh.
1947-1960s	The Indus River is divided between India and Pakistan, after 12 years of negotiation mediated by the World Bank.
1958	An unsuccessful military expedition is sent by Egypt into conflicted territory regarding the Nile waters.
1962	The construction of the Farakka barrage by India in 1962 stimulates international conflict
1974	The Tabaqah dam in Syria is threatened to be bombed by Iraq, who claims that the dam has depleted water resources from the Euphrates River.
1991	The UN discusses potentially using the Ataruk Dam in Turkey to cut off water supply from the Euphrates in Iraq.
1997	The convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses is resolved by the UN.
2011	In the 63 <sup>rd</sup> session of the UN GA, a resolution on the law of transboundary aquifers was adopted. The resolution urges concerned states “to make appropriate bilateral or regional arrangements for the proper management of their transboundary aquifers, taking into account the provisions of these draft articles.”
2012	Former president of Libya Muammar Gaddafi cuts off the water supply to Libya’s capital city.

## Historical Analysis

In order to truly understand current day transboundary affairs, it is vital that we analyze the roots of transboundary water issues. The main argument as to the cause of the increase in transboundary water disputes is that rapid population growth and industrialization have placed a strain on global fresh water resources. An increase in population, poor management of transboundary reserves and weak governance have all resulted in depleted and degraded supplies of fresh water.

Agricultural practices alone are one of the greatest culprits when it comes to water depletion and a decrease in water quality. For example the use of faulty agricultural methods can elevate the concentrations of nutrients, fecal coliforms, and sediment loads in otherwise clean, fresh water. The resulting increase in nutrients from animal waste and commercial fertilizers can lead to eutrophication, which has been known to damage aquatic ecosystems and water quality. Furthermore, toxic fecal coliforms can be introduced by animal waste which will in turn affect public health. In addition to this, agricultural practices such as grazing will intensify erosion processes thus raising sediment concentrations in water resources. An increase in fresh water sediments makes it harder to treat. Aside from degrading water quality, agricultural practices themselves consume much of the world’s water. 70% of the water used

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/mdgoverview/>

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in the world today is for agricultural processes. Furthermore OECD estimates that by 2050, 47% of the world's population may be living under severe water stress.<sup>6</sup>

Aside from agriculture, the next major water polluter and consumer is industry. The UN World Water Development Report states that around 400-500 million tons of heavy metals, solvents, toxic sludge, and other toxic metals accumulate each year from industry, a large quantity of which seeps into fresh water supplies. In some developing countries, up to 70% of industrial wastes are placed into untreated waters. Clearly, industry has played a major role in contaminating water. At the same time, industries are also known for their excessive water consumption. The water used by industries around the world amounts to 22% of total usage, with approximately 59% consumed by industry in high-income countries, and 8% in lower income countries. Water is required on all levels of production; it is used as a raw material, coolant, solvent, and energy resource. Furthermore, many litres of water are used to produce plastic, glass, as well as some fabric components. Industries are rapidly affecting the supply and demand model, in which water supplies are diminishing whereas demand is rising.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, mining and resource extraction can be regarded as one of the top three contributors to water pollution. There are many dangerous chemicals that are used in mining processes that are carried and dumped into lakes and rivers, consequently having negative effects on water quality. Sulfur compounds and heavy metals that are deep within mountains are disturbed by mining, and thus may end up in the water table as waste and/or drain-off. Furthermore cyanide that is used to chemically extract gold from ore often finds its way into rivers and groundwater. However one of the greatest offenders of mining pollution is when companies simply dump their mining waste directly into water sources.<sup>8</sup>

One of the greatest political changes that have affected water consumption and conflict has been the collapse of the Soviet Union which has resulted in the formation of 15 separate nations. Africa, divided up by colonial Europe, also contains many transboundary basins. Consequently, many rivers and lakes that once flowed through one country now cross multiple political borders.

### **Nile River**

The World Bank estimates that 160 million people live along the Nile River Basin, and that around 300 million people live in the ten countries that the Nile flows through - Burundi, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan and Egypt. The demand for water is only expected to increase as the population living along the basin is projected to double in the next 25 years.<sup>9</sup> Since water is such a fundamental resource, a shortage of this resource could readily evolve into a humanitarian crisis, adding to further social tension in these already unstable African states.

Much of the issue in terms of developmental progress stems from two agreements that were signed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The 1929 Nile Water agreement and the 1959 agreement for the Full Utilization of the Nile essentially gave Sudan and Egypt a monopoly over the Nile's water resources. Many of the East African countries that are upstream, including Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, have argued that the prior treaties unfairly give Egypt the majority of control over the water resources and they have expressed their contempt towards the long-standing agreements. The initial treaties and agreements that were made did

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<sup>6</sup> <http://extension.usu.edu/waterquality/htm/agriculturewq>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.circleofblue.org/waternews/2010/world/coming-era-of-water-scarcity-prompts-global-industrial-transformation/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.safewater.org/PDFS/resourcesknowthefacts/Mining+and+Water+Pollution.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <http://sciencein africa.com/old/index.php?q=2003/may/nile.htm>

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not involve all of the riparian nations (nations located on the bank of a natural watercourse) and as a result do not represent the interests of the upstream countries. Relations between the upper and lower riparian nations have been strained by the reluctance of Egypt and Sudan to re-negotiate the rights to the river.

**Ganges Basin**

The Ganges basin is comprised of around 50% of the Indian population and a third of Bangladesh's. Of the total irrigated land in India, 40% of it is located in the Ganges basin and there are approximately 100 urban settlements within the basin, containing a total population of 120 million.<sup>10</sup> The Farraka Barrage has caused much contention between Bangladesh and India. The Farraka Barrage has essentially cut off Bangladesh's access to the Ganges River, leaving the two nations in a contentious political situation. Following the completion of the barrage in 1975, it was agreed by both nations that it would be run with specific discharges of 41 days during April and May and the rest of the dry season of 1975. However on August 15<sup>th</sup> 1975, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was assassinated. This led to escalated tensions between the two nations, as India continued to extract water after the agreed period. In 1976, a crisis situation arose in Bangladesh as a result of the diversions from the agreement. The consequences of the diversion were extensive: tributaries experienced increased desiccation; coasts witnessed salination; and consequently fisheries, navigational, and agricultural industries faced setbacks. It was later that year that Bangladesh approached the UN and formally protested against India. It was agreed that talks would resume in December of 1976, however the talks did not bring a consensus.

It was not until 1996 that a new agreement was signed. However the agreement did not specify a clause which guaranteed a minimum amount of water to be supplied, and there were no hydrological parameters that were considered. Consequently, the agreement failed to solve the root issue. To this very day, negotiations between the two countries continue. The diversion of the Ganges has affected Bangladesh by posing a threat to water quality, public health, fisheries and agriculture. In addition, lower levels of soil moisture coupled with increases in salinity have begun to cause desertification in some regions.<sup>11</sup>

**Current Situation**

**Lack of progress**

Many transboundary river agreements have been difficult to negotiate between the transboundary countries as a result of a variety of interrelated factors, including historical disputes and rivalries, power relationships, political mistrust, an increase in nationalism, and the competing interests of short term political parties and long term national

	Transboundary River Basins		Transboundary Aquifers	
	Number	Percent of Area in International Basins (%)	Number	Percent of Area in International Aquifers (%)*
<b>Africa</b>	59	62	40	-
<b>Asia</b>	57	40	70	-
<b>Europe</b>	69	55	89	-
<b>North and Central America</b>	40	37	41	-
<b>South America</b>	38	59	29	-
<b>Total (global)</b>	263	48	269	-

<sup>10</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Farakka\\_Barrage](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Farakka_Barrage)

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.benthamsience.com/open/tohyd/articles/V004/SI0113TOHYDJ/163TOHYDJ.pdf>

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interests. Extremist groups, acting outside of the state, have further complicated negotiations. Many agreements have solely concerned water issues which thus reduces water entitlement to a zero-sum game. There has also been a lack of adequately formulated negotiations that take into account an overall development plan which could improve living standards in countries concerned. Finally, “emergence of other issues of conflict between the countries which adversely affect the negotiating atmosphere, and the presence of many vociferous, media-savvy and single issue NGOs that are more interested in promoting their own agendas and dogmas than improving the quality of life of the people whom they often claim to represent.”

As of today, a multitude of rivers, lakes, and groundwater aquifers are being shared by two or more countries; a majority of the world’s accessible freshwater crosses a political border. Approximately 40% of the global population is dependent on transboundary resources, and half of the earth’s land surface is covered by international basins.<sup>12</sup> Freshwater found in aquifers comprises 99% of the globe’s accessible water, and a third of the global population relies on aquifers alone for fresh water.

### **Climate Change**

As we move into a new era of technological and scientific development, we also bring with us the effects of climate change. Changing environments could subsequently have a large impact on the scarcity and therefore importance of transboundary water supplies. While current treaties do not take climate change into account, well developed and efficient treaties could be a solution to dealing with some of the effects of climate change.

Analysis by the Pacific Institute for the UN has stated, “As climate changes alter the form, intensity, and timing of water demand, precipitation, and runoff, past climate conditions are no longer an adequate predictor of the future.”<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, Heather Cooley, research associate has said, “Yet climate change is rarely discussed in transboundary water agreements. Most existing treaties and agreements are based on the outdated assumption that future water supply and quality will not change. Adapting to climate change is going to require changes in the institutions and policies that have been put in place under international treaties.”

Examples of where climate change has begun to affect transboundary water affairs include the Mekong River in southeastern Asia, the Colorado River in the United States, the Guarani Aquifer in South America, and the Nile in Africa. Each of these water sources will be affected by climate change, straining weak pre-existing agreements or highlighting the need for an agreement.

It is expected that approximately 60% of South America will become drier over the next 20 years. However, it is not just this lack of fresh water that is an issue. In the past couple of years, the La Plata River has experienced substantial water level increases; climate models suggest this is due to upward trends in local precipitation. By 2050, it is predicted that water level in the basin will increase by 20% as a result of climate change. These changes will create a greater risk of flooding. Flooding in the region has the potential to degrade the surface and groundwater quality because of erosion, the overflow of sewers, and the dispersion of chemicals from agricultural practices. Disease may also be spread by these new flooding conditions. With these changes in precipitation, requirements for safe water supplies will only increase.

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<sup>12</sup> Water Without Borders. Background. United Nations Department of Public Information, 2004

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.pacinst.org/reports/transboundary\\_waters/index.htm](http://www.pacinst.org/reports/transboundary_waters/index.htm)

## Case Study: Tigris-Euphrates Basin

During the 1960s, the GAP (Southeastern Anatolia Project) was implemented in Turkey. The project was aimed at harvesting water from both the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, through the construction of around 20 dams. These dams were used for both hydroelectric power and irrigation purposes.<sup>14</sup> The excessive amounts of water that Turkey extracted began to cause a conflict between the three riparian nations of Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. While the water dispute between Syria and Turkey was much more precarious, Iraq also viewed the GAP project as a threat. Tension grew between Turkey and Iraq regarding water resources as a result of Turkey's and Syria's support of the UN embargo against Iraq after the Gulf War.

On the other hand, new negotiations regarding transboundary river flow were initiated following the 2008 drought in Iraq. Unlike Syria, Turkey, and Iran who were also affected by the drought, Iraq complained regularly about the decrease in water resources. The large number of dams that were on the Euphrates River particularly angered Iraq. Turkey increased water flows a number of times to allow Iraq to have extra water supplies. As a result of the drought, Iraq's water based infrastructure has failed for years from conflict and neglect, and Iraq has seen drastic declines in both water storage and crop yields.

### Turkey

Turkey is one of the three primary countries that rely on the Euphrates-Tigris basin. While Turkey may not be the greatest consumer of the three nations, it does have the strongest economy, military, and the most stable government, with ties to NATO and Western nations. Turkey has the ability to singularly control all water flow from the Euphrates and about half the flow of the Tigris, as a result of dams, hydroelectric plants, and irrigation canals. The standard of living and economic development of Turkey have significantly increased as a result of the various projects such as dams, and irrigation canals that have allowed Turkey to extract extensive amounts of water. While Turkey is willing to share their development plants, they still maintain a goal of absolute control of the waters from the rivers that flow from their borders.

### Syria

Prior to the 1970s, Syria has historically relied on water resources from the Banyas and Orontes rivers to meet the majority of its water requirements. However in the past couple of decades, Syria's water consumption of the Euphrates through the Tabqa Dam and various other dams has significantly increased. Syria's water consumption is constantly growing in order to meet the needs of an increasing population. However while it now draws heavily from the Euphrates, Syria still believes in a "shared resources" approach and is willing to negotiate.



<sup>14</sup> [http://www.transboundarywaters.orst.edu/research/case\\_studies/Tigris-Euphrates\\_New.htm](http://www.transboundarywaters.orst.edu/research/case_studies/Tigris-Euphrates_New.htm)

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## **Iraq**

Out of all the nations that have access to the Euphrates-Tigris basin, Iraq has historically drawn the most water from these rivers. During the 1950s and 1960s, Iraq invested in construction along both rivers with the goal of harnessing resources for the production of power and irrigation. However due to the altered river flow and the enhanced use of the rivers by Syria and Turkey, as well as its heavy reliance on fresh water resources, Iraq is now in an unstable position.

## **UN Involvement**

While there is no UN committee dedicated exclusively to transboundary affairs, there are a number of UN entities that oversee transboundary waters. As a result of the 2002 World Summit and the Millennium Development goals, UN-Water (A UN inter-agency that comprises of all agencies, departments, and programs that concern water issues) was tasked with following up water related provisions that were discussed.

One of the UN's Organizations that plays a pivotal role in transboundary affairs is the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO). There are two guiding principles for this organization. The first is to assist member countries with the sharing of Transboundary Rivers, lakes, and aquifers. The second is to establish a legal environment to create a stable developmental cooperation. This is one of the paths the organization takes in order to further benefit fisheries, agricultural environments, and to support ecosystems of member countries. The FAO has proved to be an important entity to the UN, as demonstrated in a couple of recent instances. For example, the FAO was responsible for the creation of a permanent agreement in 2007 between Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia for the management of the Aquifer system in the northern Sahara. Similarly an agreement over the Iullmmeden Aquifer between Mali, Niger and Nigeria is currently being negotiated. Furthermore the FAO seeks to further assist and educate governments of the Nile Basin, with the hope that they will make more informed decisions regarding their water resources.<sup>15</sup>

## **Significant Treaties**

### **Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses**

The convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses, resolved in 1997, is the only treaty concerning shared water resources that is universally applicable. Essentially, the convention provides a template of principles and rules that can be applied and adjusted to match the needs of any particular international watercourse. The convention can only become legally binding if 35 nations ratify it. The convention outlines a number of key principles such as the reasonable utilization of international watercourses; furthermore the application of appropriate measures to prevent violence to other states that share international watercourses.<sup>16</sup>

### **UN General Assembly Resolution on the Law of Transboundary Aquifers:**

In the 63<sup>rd</sup> session of the UN GA, a resolution on the law of Transboundary aquifers was adopted. The resolution urges concerned states, "to make appropriate bilateral or regional arrangements for the proper management of their Transboundary aquifers, taking into account the provisions of these draft articles." Included in the resolution are provisions which encourage cooperation among states to reduce and

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<sup>15</sup> [http://www.unwater.org/downloads/UNW\\_TRANSBOUNDARY.pdf](http://www.unwater.org/downloads/UNW_TRANSBOUNDARY.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> <http://untreaty.un.org/cod/avl/ha/clnuiw/clnuiw.html>

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control pollution of aquifers. This resolution was a pivotal step towards Transboundary cooperation as prior to the session there was no “instrument of international law that could provide a complete set of recommendations and guidelines for the sustainable and peaceful management of Transboundary aquifers.”

### **UNECE Water Convention**

A final prominent treaty regarding Transboundary water was discussed during the UNECE Water Convention in 1992. The convention was intended to enhance national measures for the management and protection of surface and ground waters.<sup>17</sup> “It obliges parties to prevent, control and reduce transboundary impact, use transboundary waters in a reasonable and equitable way, and ensure their sustainable management and ecosystem preservation.” It states that specific agreements and joint bodies should be created by parties that border the transboundary waters. Research, development, monitoring, warning and alarm systems, mutual assistance, consultations, and exchange of information are all provisions that the convention includes.

The convention has proved to be an effective and important treaty that has been successfully implemented. For example, Lake Peipsi (Russia-Estonia), the Danube, Sava, and Rhine River basins have all been supported and developed by the convention. Furthermore bilateral agreements between central and eastern European countries, and agreements between Russian and former Soviet Union nations have all be assisted by the convention. The convention can also be credited for the improvement of dam safety in central Asia, and cooperation regarding monitoring and assessment has increased.

## **Possible Solutions and Controversies**

### **Importance of Collaboration**

While transboundary agreements are not often seen as the key to ending poverty, they can substantially reduce it. The goals of transboundary agreements are to create more efficient and productive systems of management for shared water resources. They also reduce political conflict, which can also reduce humanitarian stresses. Therefore, by passing a resolution that is both economically and socially sustainable, we are reducing the costs and risks of water use for a population, as well as improving the accessibility to water for the poor.<sup>18</sup>

Compromise is essential for both the remediation of the social and humanitarian issues of a nation as well as the extraction of economic benefits. Collaboration can help in achieving the core humanitarian goals laid out by the Millennium Development Goals (MDG’s), such as eliminating famine, improving sanitation, improving access to fresh drinking water, and altogether improving quality of life. Not only can we aid the social and humanitarian aspects of a nation, but we can also reap economic benefits to nations through concise and efficient agreements. Productive agreements regarding water resources can lead to greater encouragement for economic cooperation among the nations involved in the agreement.

The need for transboundary agreements and compromise has never been greater, as we live in a time period where 40% of the world’s populations are dependent on these shared resources. However with a changing context and climate, we must look to altering and creating up to date agreements that can reflect the needs of our changing society.

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.unece.org/?id=3004>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.transboundarywaters.orst.edu/publications/allocations/>

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With regards to collaboration, there need not always be legally binding agreements in order to stimulate progress; oftentimes there can be more effective growth when nations have their own incentives that encourage them to maintain and improve relations between each other. As mentioned earlier, the most efficient and prosperous agreements will expand beyond water and into the exchange of other resources, which will in turn create greater economic efficiency. One way of thinking about cooperation is as the exchange of baskets of benefits that add to the aggregate welfare of both sides. This approach goes beyond bargaining over volumetric allocations to identifying multiple benefits for all sides. Essentially, there are incentives for both sides to cooperate. In the past these have proved to be helpful when finding terms of agreement on both sides.

Often times, financial resource incentives are a viable solution to the stimulation and success of negotiations. For example, financing from the World Bank has assisted the Indus dispute, and investments led by the UN were central in the achievement of the Mekong Agreement. While these can be considered third party solutions which will be further discussed later on in the guide, there can also be internal financing. For example, in response to watershed agreements, India helped finance a project in Pakistan, as did Thailand in Laos.

Aside from financial resources, there can also be incentives regarding energy resources. Following the Mekong Agreement, Thailand assisted in the funding of a hydroelectric project in Laos in exchange for a portion of the power that would be generated. In conjunction with the 1986 Lesotho Highlands Treaty, a hydroelectric facility in Lesotho was partly financed by South Africa<sup>19</sup>.

### **Sharing Responsibility**

When dealing with multilateral transboundary water disputes, mechanisms designed to ensure fair distribution of resources must be in place. In many cases regarding transboundary water resources, some countries are considered downstream and others are upstream. There may be a case where a downstream country creates and manages additional storage capacity, in which case it would be compensated by the upstream nation. In this case, the benefits that come from this operation can be shared and can be financed by both parties. However, there are certain cases in which the benefits and costs cannot be easily measured and quantified, in which case compensation requires a different approach. However, there is a system called *Payment for ecosystem services* (PES) that regulates run-off and water supply, and flood mitigation. PES has the capability to internalize environmental costs, create new sources of finance, and further create opportunities for environmentally friendly investments. In addition, the idea of trading ownership shares of the water between nations is also another option.

### **Exchange of Information and Joint Monitoring**

One of the most important aspects when creating a well-managed transboundary water system is the subject of joint monitoring and the exchange of information between both parties. When making laws and policies at the transboundary level, accurate assessment that can stimulate informed decisions is vital. Furthermore, there needs to be input on the management of a basin from all of the nations concerned in order to generate comparable information. There needs to be a constant exchange of information taking place regarding issues such as pollution from accidents, the development of infrastructure projects which might affect a downstream nation, and of extreme events such as the possibility of floods and droughts. Such communication is necessary for building trust and potential for prosperity among riparian nations.

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.transboundarywaters.orst.edu/publications/patterns/>

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Currently, these kinds of key policies regarding the unrestricted and free exchange of information are being promoted by UN organizations such as UNESCO.<sup>20</sup>

### **Third Party Involvement**

Third parties have played a vital role in historical cooperation surrounding transboundary resource disputes. In the context of the Mekong agreement, which is generally perceived as a success, it is accurate to say that was it not for the UNDP and other donors, the negotiations would not have been as successful. As mentioned earlier, there was a similar scenario between India and Pakistan in which the World Bank played a crucial role in the agreements over the Indus River.<sup>21</sup>

While third parties alone cannot be relied upon to create a stable political environment, they do assist in the formation and maintenance of an agreement. Third parties can assist in the technical aspects and provide insight and knowledge regarding best practices. Furthermore they play a fundamental role in negotiations and mediation skills. Finally third parties can facilitate investments in transboundary settings (Phillips, et al, 2006).

### **Controversies Regarding Current Agreements**

One of the greatest issues regarding transboundary agreements is their ineffectiveness. Over the past 50 years, approximately 150 agreements have been signed regarding Transboundary issues. One of the issues that authors face is that each basin and aquifer is very unique from the other, and so any kind of universal law or agreement needs to be quite general. The greater problem at hand is when these vague rules attempt to resolve specific water conflicts. In addition to this, international law only governs the rights and responsibilities of states. As a result, political entities claiming water rights may not be represented. The Kurds along the Euphrates, and Palestinians along the Jordan River are just a few examples of such groups.

Another failed aspect in Transboundary agreements is that in many cases along arid and exotic streams, the upstream nation is favored; in North America, the Colorado and Rio Grande rivers are nearly dry from US use by the time they reach Mexico, even though Mexico's water supply is both delineated and protected. Countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Egypt are all in the same predicament in that they have their reserves clearly defined and guaranteed by their treaties and agreements, yet accurate and consistent enforcement is challenging. This is most likely the case for two reasons: one is that rights give way to needs, and two is that historical uses are generally considered and protected.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. When constructing a Transboundary resolution, how does one differentiate between the needs of one nation versus what another nation is entitled to?
2. In terms of creating social, humanitarian, and economic development within your nation, are legally binding agreements more effective, or should countries look ahead of simply solving water issues and into taking advantage of all benefits from transboundary agreements?
3. How has transboundary resource conflict affected the cultural, economic, and political practices?
4. What role do third parties, such as the UN, play in resolving transboundary conflict?

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<sup>20</sup> [http://www.unwater.org/downloads/UNW\\_TRANSBOUNDARY.pdf](http://www.unwater.org/downloads/UNW_TRANSBOUNDARY.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.academia.edu/2920202/International\\_Law\\_-\\_Facilitating\\_Transboundary\\_Water\\_Cooperation](http://www.academia.edu/2920202/International_Law_-_Facilitating_Transboundary_Water_Cooperation)

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5. How have transboundary conflicts in neighboring nations affected either the sovereignty or development of your nation?
6. How can Transboundary agreements provide an economic stimulus?
7. What social and humanitarian factors (famine, water pollution, etc.) have greatly aggravated transboundary tensions? How can such factors be resolved?
8. How can we remediate the effects of poverty and climate change on transboundary disputes?
9. How can an international body like the SOCHUM create a general resolution that can still address the specific needs of each transboundary case?

## Additional Resources

UN-Water on Transboundary Waters

[http://www.unwater.org/downloads/UNW\\_TRANSBOUNDARY.pdf](http://www.unwater.org/downloads/UNW_TRANSBOUNDARY.pdf)

Pacific Institute: Understanding effects of climate change for Transboundary waters

[http://www.pacinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/transboundary\\_water\\_and\\_climate\\_report3.pdf](http://www.pacinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/transboundary_water_and_climate_report3.pdf)

UNDP: Conflict and Cooperation over Transboundary Waters

[http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2006/papers/wolf\\_aaron.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2006/papers/wolf_aaron.pdf)

UN: Transboundary Waters

[http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/transboundary\\_waters.shtml](http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/transboundary_waters.shtml)

Natural Resources Forum: Transboundary Resource Allocation

<http://www.transboundarywaters.orst.edu/publications/allocations/>

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## Topic B: Conditions in Refugee Camps

### Introduction

In principle, a refugee camp is supposed to provide a safe home for people who have fled their country to escape armed conflict, political violence, corruption, or persecution. Currently there are more than thirty-nine million people who identify as refugees or internally displaced persons around the globe.<sup>22</sup> However, not all of them live in refugee camps. Some assimilate into their country of refuge, while others will attempt to find asylum in other countries.



Figure 2 - Zamzam Refugee Camp, home to over 200 000 refugees

Refugee camps are designed to provide a “temporary” place of safety during a crisis, providing very basic needs of survival. The idea is to accommodate refugees while whatever displacing factor is resolved, so that the refugee can quickly return to his/her traditional home and culture or move on to seek more permanent international relocation. While refugee camps have comprised an essential element of international action in the past, changing circumstances have drastically affected the efficacy of the program. As displacing factors, such as civil war and genocide, have become more brutal, widespread, and drawn-out, refugee camps have become increasingly more permanent. This has led to humanitarian crises within refugee camps themselves.

Due to a lack of resources and greater instability and conflict in many areas of the globe, conditions in refugee camps have steadily declined. Millions of refugees spend their days in barely livable conditions, with little access to food, water and clothing.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, with global standards for these camps decreasing, many refugee camps are home to horrendous infrastructure and basic human rights are often neglected. As ethnic groups spend increasing durations of time in these camps away from their homeland, they become further and further removed from their original way of life.

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<sup>22</sup> Kristof, N. and WuDunn, S. “Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide.” (New York: Random House, 2009), 163.

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.rwjf.org/files/research/commissionhousing102008.pdf>

## Timeline

1915	The Armenian genocide is ordered by the Ottoman government in which 1 – 1.5 million people are killed and 2 million people become refugees.
1948-Present	The Jewish and Arab communities of Palestine clash, spurring conflict that has lasted to this day. 800,000 Palestinians flee to seek refuge. There are now an estimated 4.5 million refugees, many of which live in refugee camps and whom are descendants from the original refugees of 1948. <sup>24</sup>
1950	“The UN refugee agency emerged in the wake of World War II to help Europeans displaced by that conflict. Optimistically, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was established on December 14, 1950 by the United Nations General Assembly with a three-year mandate to complete its work and then disband.”
1951	A United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees determines the rights of one who is given asylum as well as the responsibilities of the host nation.
1979	The Sa Kaeo Refugee camp was formed as the first organized relief camp set up along the Thai-Cambodian border and at its peak housed over 30,000 refugees.
1991-Present	The Dadaab refugee camp is founded in north-eastern Kenya in 1991. It is largely comprised of Somali’s who have fled the civil war in Somalia. Originally intended to house 90,000 refugees, the camp now holds 400,000 refugees, making it the largest refugee camp in the world.
1994	Mass genocide erupts in Rwanda in which 500,000-1,000,000 Tutsis are slaughtered by the majority Hutu population.
2003-Present	Over 250,000 Sudanese refugees take refuge in Chad in response to the violence of the ongoing Darfur crisis.
2011-Present	In response to the Syrian Civil war that began in 2011, over 1.5 million Syrians flee Syria as refugees. They enter camps in neighbouring nations such as Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey.

## Historical Analysis

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, most, if not all, refugee camps were founded in response to genocide, civil war, and political persecution. As one commentator noted, “It is not rare that such persecutions constitute crimes against humanity or crimes of genocide. Refugee camps give rise to complex situations, especially when their residents are still confronted with danger. Because of the coexistence of enemy combatants, or of people from different ethnic groups who have a stake in the conflict, violence is a frequent occurrence in the camps. The conditions of containment are also favourable to the development of organized crime.” In these cases, the creation of refugee camps brings many difficult and new challenges. In response to crimes against humanity and genocide, refugee camps tend to have much larger populations and thus still present subpar human-living conditions.

Around three million Iraqi Shiites and Kurds entered through the borders of Iran and Turkey, filling up camps between 1988 and 1996. During 1992 and 1995 when “ethnic cleansing” was being conducted, hundreds of thousands of Yugoslavs were forced from their homes and persecuted.<sup>25</sup> In 1999, there was a similar situation with the Albanian Kosovars. In response to genocide in 1994 that killed over 800,000

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=86>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.nothingbutnets.net/nets-save-lives/>>

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people, more than two million Rwandans fled to refugee camps in Burundi, Tanzania, and Zaire.<sup>26</sup> Finally, the Israel-Palestine situation has created thousands of displaced Palestinians, resulting in the formation of permanent refugee communities in neighbouring countries. Now, Palestinians make up half of the population of Jordan.

### **European Refugee Movement**

In the 1928, the US passed The Displaced Persons Act. Deeply rooted in anti-Communism causes, this Bill led to the relaxation of US policy for immigration. Subsequently a US escapee program was established in the same year that offered sanctuary and homage to refugees from communist nations.

It was growing conflict between the east and the west in the initial years of the Cold War that provided the backdrop for subsequent US legislation. In response to the Refugee Relief Act of 1953, 214,000 refugees were admitted to the US over a three year period, and of these 186,000 came from Communist countries.

900,000 European refugees had been incorporated into western European countries by 1959. Approximately 461,000 had been absorbed by the US, and a remaining 523,000 by other nations. However many “extreme” refugees still remained in refugee camps. It was at which point that the UN developed an ambitious attempt to resolve the refugee problem altogether.

In 1959, the World Refugee Year initiative commenced, a program designed to “clear the camps.” An ambitious and comprehensive plan, it did achieve some success in Europe. By the end of 1960, all the refugee camps within Europe were shut down – the first time since the start of World War II.

On the other hand, the more pressing global refugee problem was still at work. Millions of fugitives from persecution, natural disasters, and hunger in Africa and Asia continued to scramble for secure homes. And thus Europe who had once been primarily an exporter of refugees, had now become an importer. As of today it is estimated by the UN that there are over 17 million refugees, stateless people, and asylum seekers looking for homes around the world.

## **Current Situation**

### **Reproductive Health**

Rarely in refugee settings is reproductive health care considered a priority. Only in the past couple of decades have there been actual comprehensive studies on fertility rates. In the last comprehensive study regarding fertility rates, scientists discovered that fertility rates in particular camps were “extraordinarily high,” and were surpassing the rates of both the countries of origin and asylum. One example is based on a survey from 1987 in which there were an estimated 13.6 children per Afghan refugee woman. Birth rates were approximately 55 per 1,000 population in Cambodian camps within Thailand.<sup>27</sup>

It was only recently that the UNHCR and its affiliated agencies started to research the impacts of family planning and birth spacing, as well as sexual education and contraceptives within a refugee camp setting. In many camps where women lack access to family planning programs, self-induced abortions are very common even though there is a high risk to women’s life.

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<sup>26</sup> Food, Water, Sanitation, and Housing in Refugee Camps - Unite For Sight." *Unite For Sight*. N.p., n.d. Web. 14 Aug. 2013. <<http://www.uniteforsight.org/refugee-health/module3>>.

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/4ae95d226.html>

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In both refugee camps and war-affected areas, education campaigns are limited when it comes to the subjects of sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS. Furthermore there are often few doctors and nurses in refugee settings. It is also nearly impossible for women to receive medical care as they are limited by cultural taboos, especially when talking to men who are not members of their immediate family.

### **Water**

It is of utmost importance that refugees are given both an adequate quantity and a safe quality of water, as water can have a dramatic effect on major sectors of refugee society such as nutrition, health, education and sanitation. It is estimated by the UNHCR that less than half of the refugee camps around the globe are able to provide the recommended amount of daily clean water: 20 liters per person. A lack of clean water can lead to the spread of ailments such as cholera and diarrhea. A 2005 study carried out in a Kenyan refugee camp discovered that there were 11 cholera cases in households who had access to 110L of water per day. However, cholera affected an astounding 163 people who lived in a household that only had access to 37L of water per day. There were similar tendencies discovered regarding diarrhea. “A study carried out between 2005 and 2006 in Kenyan and Ghanaian refugee camps found that the households who reported a case of diarrhea within the previous 24 hours collected 26% less water on average than those households who did not report any cases.”

The quality of water is just as important as the quantity, as contamination also leads to disease. One thing that has been implemented in order to decrease contamination is a public health initiative that focusses on hygiene education and the distribution of an “improved bucket” that had been utilized in refugee camps in Southern Malawi. The bucket is a 20 liter container that has a closed lid to dissuade any hand entry, and also a spout for easy distribution. The “improved bucket” had fecal coliform values that were 53% lower than that of the controlled vessels. “The use of water purification tablets that self-dissolve in water, often chlorine-based can also help to decrease diarrhoeal diseases and can be used for large quantities of water depending on the size of the tablet.”<sup>28</sup>

### **Food**

One of the greatest issues that refugee camps face is a lack of food. “I spent years in a refugee camp in Ethiopia, and there I watched two young boys, perhaps twelve years old, fighting so viciously over rations that one kicked the other to death. He had not intended to kill his foe, of course, but we were young and very weak.” This quotation underscores a common reality within refugee camps. Ongoing malnutrition increases a refugee’s susceptibility to a diverse range of diseases and illnesses. A majority of camps do not have enough food to feed their entire population and so resident refugees become highly dependent on humanitarian aid. It is recommended by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees that each person receives at least 2,100 calories a day; most camps fail to provide this number of calories. In 2005 and 2006 the daily amount of food distributed to Tanzanian refugees was only 1,700 calories per person. A study found that in the largest Thai refugee camp, 30% of the population was chronically malnourished. Furthermore a joint UNHCR and World Food Program study in 2006, found that there were unacceptable rates of malnutrition in protracted refugee camps in nations such as Kenya, Sudan, and Ethiopia. Even if the minimum amount of food is given to refugees each day, the caloric intake is still reduced as most refugees will sell their food rations in exchange for non-food items. Furthermore, food related diseases in refugee camps do not only occur from a lack of food. Often times it is the lack of diversity of fruits and vegetable that causes refugees to suffer from a lack of essential vitamins and minerals which in turn can lead to a variety of diseases.<sup>29</sup> In Zambia, the Meheba refugee camps is more a

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<sup>28</sup> <http://www.uniteforsight.org/refugee-health/module3>

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.uniteforsight.org/refugee-health/module3>

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permanent settlement, therefore it is recommended that refugee grown their own food in individual gardens, thus decreasing malnutrition and ensuring a variety of fruits and vegetables.

### **Education**

Something that is often lacking in refugee settings is a sense of security and hope, which is why schooling in these settings is of utmost importance for refugee children. "After times of conflict, educational activities play a very important role in helping to reintroduce a sense of normalcy and routine into the lives of children and adolescents." Education for refugees has many benefits, and creates an immediate positive and widespread impact. It teaches important values such as self-reliance, and creates human capital that is vital for development. Furthermore, education can also extend to adults as well, when it comes to matters of health and hygiene.

According to a UN report on Congolese refugees, "formal education was considered by nearly all boys and girls and their parents to be an essential ingredient in the plan to make a better life." Similarly, in the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya, "education in the camp was highly regarded [by refugees]... as a helpful solution for their personal problems." While the need for education is recognized by both children and parents, many refugee children, especially women, are not able to attend school. For the few that do have access to school, the quality for is still very poor. Another issue is that many refugee children have lost their parents and thus need to care for their younger siblings and provide food for their families. Education can also help protect native culture and language in refugee camps, though only if appropriate infrastructure is in place.

### **Military Recruitment**

Another grave problem facing refugee camps is military recruitment. One of the greatest perpetrators is the Kenyan government, which recruited soldiers from the Dadaab refugee camp. "Kenyan authorities have directly supported the drive, which has recruited hundreds of Somali men and boys in the sprawling Dadaab refugee camps as well as Kenyan citizens from nearby towns."

As of October 2012, recruiters claiming to be representatives of the Somali Transitional Federal Government have openly operated in Dadaab refugee camps in Kenya, near the Somali border, with the intention of enlisting young, vulnerable refugees to create a force to fight in Somalia. However, military recruitment in refugee camps, especially of children, is contrary to the key principle recognized by international refugee law that refugee camps should be completely humanitarian and civilian based.

The African director of Human Rights Watch, Georgette Gagnon, has said "Permitting recruitment of fighters in refugee camps undermines the very purpose of the camps - to be a place of refuge from the conflict. Kenyan authorities need to immediately put a stop to this recruitment drive targeting Somali refugees."

The al-Shabaab Somali terrorist group has also looked to recruit militants in Somali and Kenyan refugee communities. The drive has also been targeted at Kenyans who live in around the towns of Garissa and Dadaab and who aren't in refugee camps.

Human rights watchdogs have also found that army recruiters are deceiving candidates with promises of large salaries and claims that they are supported by the United Nations and other international entities. Recruiters have pressured teenagers into lying about their ages in order to be able to join the forces without having formal family consent. While high level Kenyan officials such as the foreign minister have denied that the recruitment of refugees is actually occurring, it is operating directly with Kenyan support, which even provides government transport vehicles and guards.

### **Emerging economies in refugee camps**

As it currently stands, refugees are spending most of their lives in camps. Humanitarian aid, designed to be a short-term solution, is not adequate to sustain basic needs over this length of time; thus, refugees have developed alternative methods of self-support. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, refugee camps are on the verge of becoming urban environments that have their own economies.

One of the key reasons as to why economies are developing in refugee camps is because foreign aid is insufficient in addressing all the needs of the refugees. An example of this activity can be found in a study of refugees in Nigeria that determined that “the humanitarian effort supporting Nigerian refugee camps is often not enough to sustain them while in the camp for the period they are to stay.” Another example is of refugees in Thailand, who receive only the rations required by international standards. There are no provisions for vegetables, meats, fresh fruits, or non-food items. As a result, refugees automatically develop their own economies built on petty trading and informal, small-scale manufacturing.<sup>30</sup> Refugees predominantly make a living from small businesses and agricultural production if the land is fertile. Most refugee camps have at least one trading center for small businesses.

On the other hand, refugees face many restrictions that usual entrepreneurs do not, which in turn makes life even more difficult. One example is that refugees are restricted in terms of movement, as travel outside of the settlement requires a permit. Refugees who are caught without a permit face jail time or deportation. Furthermore, refugees are required to have a work permit to work outside of the settlement. They are victims of high transportation and information costs, which deprive them of knowledge regarding crop prices in external markets and the ability to take part in those markets. As a result, refugees must depend on traders to transport, buy and sell their goods to the outside world which reduces their profit margin. Often times, a black market develops. The current environment in refugee camps is not particularly conducive to industrious entrepreneurship, yet residents still try to foster a sense of economic activity.

One final important element pertaining to refugee camp economies involves the sale of rations. Occasionally refugees are forced to sell UNHCR food rations because they do not match their traditional diet, and they use the profit to buy culturally suitable foods. “Sudanese refugees in Kakuma, for example, sell a proportion of the wheat flour provided by the World Food Programme (WFP) in order to buy millet, sorghum, maize flour and cassava flour, which are elements of their traditional diet.” Furthermore refugees often partake in a system called recycling where they will leave the camp and re-enter with new identities in order to receive more food rations. “The trading resulting from extra ration cards provided the basis for a vast secondary economy at Kakuma, and kept thousands of refugees from anemia and related illnesses.”<sup>31</sup> The extra ration cards allow refugees to purchase non-food items that they may require, or other food that the UN does not provide.

## **UN Involvement**

### **UNICEF Education Programs in Dadaab**

UNICEF has implemented a program called “Schools in Refugee Camps,” which was established to provide learning environments as well as child-friendly spaces in refugee camps.<sup>32</sup> But due to the massive population in Dadaab, these schools have been struggling to deal with the so many refugees. In the Dagahaley Camp, there is a school that has trouble finding teachers and spaces to teach the children in.

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<sup>30</sup> <http://www.uniteforsight.org/refugee-health/module5>

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.uniteforsight.org/refugee-health/module5>

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.unicef.org.nz/store/doc/SchoolInTheDadaabRefugeeCamps.pdf>

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The school has only 25 classrooms but has 4,036 students.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, a number of students must work outside in the heat because there isn't enough classroom space. Furthermore, the teacher to student ratio is 1 to 168.

To assist the teachers and students in these conditions, UNICEF has donated simple education resources as well as tents for the students "to give them a sheltered place to learn." Many of the children have faced famine, thirst and violent conflict and have travelled far to escape it. Many of the children in the Dadaab camp have lost family members on the long journey. Within the Dadaab refugee camp there are 156,000 children who are of the school going age, however only a third are receiving any kind of education. The majority of children from Somalia have never had a formal education; many have not even seen a school before. This leads to long term social issues, as the up-and-coming generation still lacks the skills necessary to break the vicious cycle of oppression and poverty.

**1951 Refugee Convention<sup>34</sup>**

The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, with just one "amending" Protocol adopted in 1967 (see below), is the central feature of today's international agreement on refugee protection. Some 144 States (out of a total United Nations membership of 192) have now ratified either one or both of these instruments (as of August 2008). The Convention, which entered into force in 1954, is by far the most widely ratified refugee treaty, and remains central also to the protection activities of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

In the aftermath of the Second World War, dealing with refugees and displaced persons was high on the international agenda. At its first session in 1946, the United Nations General Assembly recognized not only the urgency of the problem, but also the cardinal principle that "no refugees or displaced persons who have finally and definitely ... expressed valid objections to returning to their countries of origin ... shall be compelled to return ..." (resolution 8 (I) of 12 February 1946). The United Nations' first post-war response was a specialized agency, the International Refugee Organization (IRO, 1946-1952). Although this organ initially achieved success in providing protection and assistance, it was expensive and also got caught up in the politics of the Cold War.

This historical context helps to explain both the nature of the Convention and some of its apparent limitations. The Charter of the United Nations identifies the principles of sovereignty, independence, and non-interference within the reserved domain of domestic jurisdiction as fundamental to the success of the Organization (Article 2 of the Charter of the United Nations). In December 1948, the General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 14, paragraph 1, of which recognizes that, "Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution", but the individual was only then beginning to be seen as the beneficiary of human rights in international law. These factors are important to an understanding of both the manner in which the 1951 Convention was drafted (that is, initially and primarily as an agreement between States as to how they will treat refugees), and the essentially reactive nature of the international community to refugee protection (that is, the system is triggered by a cross-border movement, so that neither prevention, nor the protection of internally displaced persons come within its range).

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.unicef.org.nz/store/doc/SchoolInTheDadaabRefugeeCamps.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> <http://untreaty.un.org/cod/avl/ha/prsr/prsr.html>

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## UNRWA

The United Nations Relief and Welfare Agency for Palestine provides protection, advocacy, and assistance to over five million Palestinian refugees in the Middle East. The agency offers a wide range of services, from health care, education, and relief to improving camp infrastructure, community support, and micro financing capabilities. Furthermore, it operates in Jordan, Lebanon, the Gaza Strip, the Syrian Arab Republic, and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. 1.4 million Palestinians, one third of the total number of Palestinian refugees, live in these 58 UNRWA recognized camps.<sup>35</sup>

There are a number of criteria that must be met for a camp to be officially recognized by the UNRWA. Firstly there must be an agreement of terms between the UNRWA and the host government. While the UNRWA does not run camps or have any police or administrative powers within the camps, they do provide services such as food and healthcare. The UNRWA also provides many facilities in areas that are outside recognized camps to provide services to a large number of registered Palestinian refugees. The UNRWA's services are offered to all those living in its operation areas and who are registered with the agency. The UNRWA definition of a refugee also includes those who are descendant of people that became refugees in 1948. In 1950, only 914,000 Palestinian refugees inhabited these camps; now, the number has grown to 12 million.<sup>36</sup>

## UN Failures

The Dadaab refugee camp in Northern Kenya is home to hundreds of thousands of people, although the camp was only designed to hold 90,000. This UN-led camp has admitted to not meeting the most basic living needs of its residents. There are more than a quarter of a million Somalis that are crowded within the camp, refugees fleeing the constant civil war in their own country. Although there are clear negative consequences of this harsh overcrowding, Kenya is avoiding calls for expansion. The United Nations refugee agency, the UNHCR, believes that more than 6,000 refugees arrive each month and the camp has no choice but to accept them. The Dadaab camp is a city that is comprised of three sprawling tented refugee camps. "As Somalis lined up for their daily ration of food, one resident, Mohamed Shukra Shukra, told the BBC: "The problem is no water... no hospital, no food, it's a problem."

Even the UN knows there are fundamental issues with the current structure of refugee camps like the Dadaab camp. Senior operations manager for the Dadaab camp, Bono Katand, said, "If you talk about health the standard is one health centre to 10,000 population. We're talking of 28,000. When you talk



Figure 3- Aerial view of the Dadaab camp, Kenya

<sup>35</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United\\_Nations\\_Relief\\_and\\_Works\\_Agency\\_for\\_Palestine\\_Refugees\\_in\\_the\\_Near\\_East](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Relief_and_Works_Agency_for_Palestine_Refugees_in_the_Near_East)

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=86>

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about water we're only getting less than 12 litres of water per person per day while the standard is 20 litres." Yet still the agency insists that the problem is not their fault. "Unless you get more land you will have difficulties providing enough water, we will still have difficulties providing enough shelter. We'll still have difficulties providing enough health facilities within the location that they are now."

## Possible Solutions

### **Micro-Financing in Refugee Settings**

Much past success within refugee camps can be credited to charities and international aid organizations. Such organizations have been crucial in supplying emergency relief to refugees. However, when it comes to long-term conditions in refugee camps, aid and funding are largely unsustainable. Consequently, entrepreneurship projects are vital to reducing a refugee's dependency on international aid. Both micro financing and social entrepreneurship are key tools when it comes to the improvement of lives of the most vulnerable members of a refugee camp.

While micro financing provides obvious economic benefits, it also very valuable from a non-economic standpoint. "Instead of being regarded as shiftless, destitute and dishonest, [refugees] are given a psychological boost by being perceived as would-be-entrepreneurs worthy of trust." For example, many benefits come from the investing in only one farmer: "even if only marginally successful, the farmer needs help at harvest time so that casual labor is taken on. When farmers have a profitable year, their first expenditure is home improvement. Materials and labor come from the village. As farmers climb out of subsistence production, they take other members of their village with them. Perhaps one of the most important effects on a small farmer having just a little money to spare is the apparently universal instinct to spend money on educating his children." Essentially, we have gone from helping one individual farmer, to creating a sustainable community with a symbiotic relationship.

The Red Lion bakery provides an excellent example of the type of entrepreneurship and utilization of human capital that we should be emphasizing. A Sierra Leonean refugee was a successful baker, before fleeing to Gambia. When he reached the refugee camp he did not have the funds or resources to be a baker at the camp. However, he eventually received funding from a microfinance enterprise. With the funds he received, he purchased an oven and baking materials. As demand for his goods rose within and even outside the camp, he began to hire and train other refugees to assist him and thus created the "Red Lion Bakery."

Another example comes from the Kakuma Refugee Camp, where a couple members of the Somali community created a microcredit system with the purpose of aiding groups of women with their business models. Once one group had paid their debt, there was funding for the next group. The system was effective to the point that Somali leaders estimated that around 90% of the camp's population was no longer dependant on UNHCR aid.

Micro financing can often serve as a springboard from which refugees can break the cycle of poverty. However, "Microfinance needs to be developed and implemented with a comprehensive understanding of what constitutes the most feasible path for self-reliance. Any one of the numerous regulatory requirements (such as work permits and business licenses) for refugees living in camps can very easily destroy the prospects for what otherwise may have been a sound livelihood strategy."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> <http://www.uniteforsight.org/refugee-health/module6>

## **Human Rights and Peace Education**

If educational programs are designed and implemented properly, they can be used to reduce ethnic and racial tensions, thus preventing future human rights abuses and even refugee flows. The UNHCR has developed many pilot education initiatives dealing with human rights, peace, and conflict resolution in both schools for adults and children. For example a school programme in a refugee camp in Kenya will offer peace education classes weekly to around 42,000 children; 9,000 youth and adults have graduated from this programme. Similar peace programs have also been developed in Liberia, Guinea, and Uganda, and discussions have commenced for starting similar programmes in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Ethiopia. The goal for these programmes is to deepen respect for human rights of all people, including minority groups, and also to remove a primary cause of refugee flows.<sup>38</sup>

## **Cash for Work**

As mentioned several times above, Dadaab is currently the world's largest refugee camp. Oxfam, a British NGO, has implemented cash-for-work initiatives in order to offer the refugee community a chance to earn an income and at the same time feel a sense of accomplishment as they help provide for their families.

Men and women are being paid around 250-500 Kenya Shillings a day varying on their skill abilities. Men have jobs such as constructing latrines, reporting on livestock that is dead in order for it to be removed for disease prevention, and clearing lands for relocated families. Women have been employed by Oxfam to help dispose of piles of packaging that have been discarded from newly created tents and materials. It's simple yet effective jobs that help garner a sense of independence and self-reliance for the refugee community.<sup>39</sup>

## **Hygiene promotion**

In Kenya, thousands of refugees are benefiting from a hygiene promotion project that seeks to build awareness about cleanliness and the importance of sanitation. One aspect of the program includes training the refugee community about hygiene and thus building both their self-awareness and self-reliance, while still promoting long-term stability. This project has assisted more than 42,000 refugees in the Kakuma camp. "The latrine project has included in its training programme the water, sanitation and hygiene component that encompasses proper latrine use and maintenance, hand washing with soap/ash and water at critical times, safe water chain and general hygiene that encourages the Kakuma refugee community to observe the following measures:

- Cleaning the latrines daily by scrubbing with broom and soapy water
- Closing the door when using the latrine for privacy
- Closing the latrine door after using the latrine
- Keeping the latrine squat hole covered all the time to prevent free movement of flies and water from entering inside the latrine
- Washing hands with water and soap or ashes after using the latrine
- Training children how to use a latrine correctly."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/GuideMinorities12en.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.oxfam.org/en/emergencies/east-africa-food-crisis/cash-work-kenya-latrines-dadaab>

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.nrc.no/?aid=9160701>

### **Improving Health in Refugee Camps**

There are many issues that face refugee camps when it comes to providing adequate health care. Refugee camps are in fact much harder to improve from a health stand point as they tend to be remote, hard to access by road, and have minimal power supply. Increasing populations coupled with limited resources further strain basic necessities such as water and food. Finally, refugee camps are highly mobile settings in that there is a constant in and out flow of people, making it even more difficult to improve health care over a period of time. In the past couple of years a number of innovative techniques have been developed to help improve the health of refugees living in camps.

In one case, an ultrasound machine was used at the Lugufu Refugee Camp in Tanzania. In this camp, a study was conducted that determined that ultra sound could be effectively implemented into the camp. In 2005, a group of physicians arrived and taught health care providers at the camp about how to operate an ultrasound. During a two year study period, the healthcare workers were able to operate the ultra sound to perform exams on childbearing women in order to diagnose female obstetric and pelvic issues, as well as to diagnose a variety of tropical infectious diseases. This small bit of technology that we can often take for granted greatly enhanced the ability of health-care providers, allowing them to better care for their patients who had already been through so much.

### **Reproductive Health Group in Guinea**

An innovative technique was developed by the Reproductive Health Group which played a large role in improving education as well as access to reproductive health care in refugee settings. It was through the efforts of Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees who served as midwives and nurses in Guinean camps that the program was created. Acknowledging the absence of adequate health resources, the limited number of facilities, and even the language discrepancy between refugees and Guinean health workers, the refugees developed a group that provided information and advice to refugees on the subjects of family planning as well as reproductive health. The group's members were recruits from the refugee community itself, and so they trained refugee women to be able to give contraceptives and health education, and they developed drama groups in order to reach male adolescents and educate the camp. In 1996, as a result of the group's success, it was able to receive official NGO status, and it quickly became the most effective provider of health services in Guinea. The group played a pivotal role in both educating the community and disseminating information. The UN estimates that the use of contraceptives in both Sierra Leone and Guinea ranges from 3.9% to 4.1%. However, in camps where the Reproductive Health Group operates, contraceptive coverage for Sierra Leonean and Guinean refugees was 17%. Clearly, the Reproductive Health Group's work has assisted the community and the success of this initiative demonstrates the value of community engagement in improving the health of a population.

### **Relocating Refugees**

Of course, the following possible solutions assume that long-term refugee camps are here to stay. There is always the option of establishing a framework by which the UN could try to reintegrate refugees into normal social conditions, whether it be in new host countries, or countries of origin. Refugee camps were initially intended to be temporary shelters for displaced persons; the argument could be made that SOCHUM should focus on finding ways to uphold this original mandate, rather than to attempt to accommodate the growing, seemingly-permanent refugee populations in these sub-standard camps.

## Discussion Questions

1. Has international aid and funding helped to develop refugee camps, or has it made refugees more reliant on aid and thus, less self-sustainable? Why?
2. How can we develop a successful system to monitor progress in refugee camps?
3. In the future, how can we create camps that are strictly temporary, yet still meet the needs of refugees?
4. How can we improve economic, social, and humanitarian conditions in refugee camps?
5. How can we address the specific issues of each refugee camp?
6. Is repatriation a viable option in terms of minimizing populations in refugee camps?
7. What role do social institutions and services play in improving the general health of refugee camps?
8. What kinds of programs and initiatives can be implemented in order to limit a refugee's reliance on international aid? In other words, how can we empower refugees?

## Additional Resources

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

<http://www.unhcr.org.uk/>

The 1951 Refugee Convention

<http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49da0e466.html>

Unite for Site Refugee Health

<http://www.uniteforsight.org/refugee-health/>

UNICEF Schools in Refugee Camps

<http://www.unicef.org.nz/store/doc/SchoolInTheDadaabRefugeeCamps.pdf>

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