

# **Forced migration in Africa: a challenge to development**

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## **Abstract**

This article discusses the negative effects of forced population displacement on democratization and sustainable development in Sub-Saharan Africa. The history of Sub-Saharan Africa is marked by forced displacements of people both within and outside the boundaries of their respective countries. The manifestation, the causes and the consequences of forced displacements in Africa are differently experienced in space and time across the continent. These forced movements of populations have been accompanied by untold sufferings and violations of human rights. Moreover, forced displacement in Africa has a direct impact on the development of the continent. In fact, people's flight has negatively affected the socio-cultural cohesion as well as economic and political systems of a large number of African societies. This article traces the historical events that prompted massive displacement of populations and analyses the impact of the phenomenon of forced migration on sustainable development in Sub-Saharan Africa.

## **Introduction: Conceptualizing forced migration**

The phenomenon of forced migration is fraught with controversial and, some times, contradictory interpretations and connotations. We talk of forced migration in opposition to voluntary migration. In this way, displacement is viewed from its causes and/or from its purpose. Thus, accordingly, we may talk of economic migration as opposed to socio-political migration (Turton 2003). Whereas, the former refers to migrants who leave their respective residence and settle elsewhere in search of economic opportunities such as employment, business opportunities, education, etc. (Berger 1987; Adepaju 1989); the latter refers to migrations caused by social and political problems such as armed conflicts, human rights violations, natural disasters, etc. (Berger 1987; Bolzman 1996, Anthony, 1999). In these cases forced migrants, commonly referred to as refugees, flee their places of residence for their physical security and to protect themselves from an imminent threat to their physical well-being. Thus, Nick Van Hear (1998, 44) talks of voluntary as opposed to involuntary nature of the forces that lead to migration. Anthony Richmond (1994, 59)

distinguishes between 'proactive' and 'reactive' migration. He classifies migrants in two main categories of those with agency (choice) and those without agency, forced migrants being those with little or no agency. However, the history of migration in Sub-Saharan Africa since the arrival of white settlers presents some particularities to this generalization and conceptualization of the phenomenon of migration. This article aims to address the social, cultural, political and demographical dimensions and particularities of forced migration in Sub-Saharan Africa.

In migration discourse, the debate revolves around the voluntary migration as opposed to forced migration. Although it is difficult to conceptualize, let alone to measure the degree of voluntariness in regard to migration processes, the generally agreed interpretation is that voluntary migration concerns displacements in search for economic opportunities (Van Hear 1998). Forced migration, by contrast, is associated with the threat and/or fear that force people to flee their place of residence in search for security and safety (Deng 1993). Forced migrations are also divided into two categories depending on the causes of displacement. We can distinguish between forced migration caused by natural disasters on the one hand and migration caused by violence and/or armed conflict, also known as man-made displacement as well as migration in response to repressive state policies and persecution, that is, refugee migration in a narrow sense, as defined by international humanitarian law, on the other (Sen 1981). However, the realities in Africa show many instances where the delimitation between these types of migration is not clear. Their causes and consequences also present socio-political and economic factors specific to African historical realities. The natural disasters that have caused mass displacement in Africa include droughts, floods and famine in countries such as Ethiopia, Mozambique and currently Niger. The long-term consequences of these natural disasters on national economies have also continued to force people to migrate even after the natural crisis.

According to Kunz (1973), refugees are different from voluntary migrants in that they have to leave their homeland against their will, with no positive motivation to settle anywhere else. Olson (1979) points out that refugees differ from other migrants in that refugees are forced to leave their homes because of a change in their environment which makes it impossible to

continue life as they have known it. They are coerced by an external force to leave their homes and go elsewhere. In Kunz's theoretical framework, immigrants are seen as pulled and attracted to the new land by opportunities and better living conditions obtainable there. Refugees on the other hand are not pulled out but rather they are pushed out of their homelands. However, in African migration reality the push-pull factor as conceived in Kunz's theoretical framework is not easily demarcated with regard to the distinction between economic migrants and refugees. As Ricca (1990, 7) argues, in Africa the majority of migrants are forced into exile in one way or another.

The term 'refugee' not only carries empirical sociological and socio-political connotations, but above all, is a normative and legal category, enshrined as such in international law (Kraler 2005). Thus, there exists a body of legal instruments regulating and defining 'refugees' at international and regional levels. For instance, the 1951 Refugee Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol defines a refugee as a person who lives outside his own country and is unable or unwilling to return to his/her country or to avail him/herself to the protection of his/her government because of a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion (art 1A(2)). The 1969 OAU Refugee Convention broadens this definition to every person who, owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of his/her country of origin or nationality, is compelled to leave his/her place of habitual residence in order to seek refuge in another place outside his/her country of origin or nationality (art 1(2)).

However, social scientists, are well advised to bear in mind the 'practical', that is, political implications of the term "refugee" and the analytical consequences of the – in contemporary discourse at least – predominantly legal origin of the term. As a corollary, social scientists need to be acutely aware of the possible pitfalls entailed in unreflectedly adopting legal categories as categories of (social) analysis: legal categories may not easily translate into social analysis, and a legal status does not necessarily correspond with membership in a (social or political) group in a narrow sense.

International legal instruments also provide for procedures to determine the status of 'refugee'. By default, this status is granted individually to a person

who has applied to be considered as refugee (however, in practice, individual status determination is rare in African states and most refugees are accepted as de facto refugees, see below). The factors to be considered in granting the refugee status or rejecting the application are clearly stated in the 1951 Convention and its additional protocol as well as the regional legal instruments which broaden the scope of consideration of the term of 'refugee'. The responsibility to grant or deny the refugee status to the claimant lies with the State in which the asylum is being sought. The UNHCR is mandated to assist governments to follow the rules and procedures in granting refugee status, providing assistance and protection to qualified refugees and asylum seekers. The UNHCR is also mandated to find durable solutions to people's flight. Three solutions have traditionally been suggested to address 'refugee problems', namely, (1) voluntary repatriation, (2) permanent settlement in the host country and (3) resettlement in a third country. Without entering in a debate about the best and/or the successful of any of the three envisaged durable solutions of the refugee problem, it is worthy noting that the search for durable solutions to refugee crises requires more alternatives considering the magnitude and the recurrence of refugee crises that often display similar features.

However, the procedure of granting refugee status on individual basis has proven to be impossible in some circumstances, especially in developing countries, in Africa in particular, where frequent incidence of mass refugee flows renders individual status determination procedures largely impractical. Only countries which receive a limited number of asylum seekers such as the western countries<sup>1</sup> and some African countries which are privileged to be geographically situated far from refugee producing countries can follow individual status determination procedure. In these circumstances where the status determination on individual basis is not possible, a procedure known as 'prima facie' is used to recognize refugees collectively and to accord protection to such refugees on humanitarian grounds (Rwamatwara 2003). This procedure is favoured by many States,

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted, however, that in regard to past incidences of mass refugee flows, also Western States accepted refugees in a de facto manner, e.g. in regard to Hungarian and Czechoslovakian refugees following the uprising in 1956 and the Prague Spring in 1968, respectively. Also, in response to the Bosnian and Kosovo crises, a specific legal framework ("Temporary Protection System") was elaborated to address mass refugee flows and to accept refugees outside established refugee determination procedures in a de facto manner.

especially in developing countries, not only because the individual procedure is not practical but also and primarily to avoid the responsibility of granting the rights and privileges that the individual refugee status brings to its bearer (Ibid). It is also important to note that the 'prima facie' procedure is supposed to be used temporarily while preparing for individual determination of refugee status. However, the reality is that many refugees in Africa spend many years, if not their entire life in exile under this regime of collective protection. This collective recognition of refugees on humanitarian ground also creates confusion and abuse of the term 'refugee' as non-refugees in the sense of the above-mentioned international legal instruments find it easy to call themselves refugees. This constitutes the biggest challenge faced by some African countries such as South Africa in trying to identify and separate genuine refugees from illegal migrants (Okoth-Obbo 2001).

Moreover, States generally interpret and apply the principles and rights contained in these legal instruments in a manner that suits their security and sovereignty. Thus the guarantees of these instruments depend entirely on the political will of the States (Mupedziswa 1993). As Deng (1993, 110) explains, this tension between a local and global perspective (regarding the protection of the dispossessed) lies at the heart of the controversy over national sovereignty.

Moreover, several countries have their own legal framework of welcoming or rejecting inflows of migrants be it voluntary or forced migrants. In many countries there exist legal and administrative policies which are designed to control and limit entries of unwanted migrants and/or selectively facilitate entry of desirable migrants. These legal instruments and policies set barriers around the term 'refugee' by excluding the people who do not fulfill the stated conditions. Thus, in many cases forced migrants are harassed, incarcerated, deported or forcibly repatriated back to the danger that they ran away from irrespective of their genuine case for 'refugee' status consideration (Mupedziswa 1993; Rutinwa 2001a). In other instances applications for asylum are deliberately put on hold for years to avoid the commitment of the State concerned to provide refugee entitlements to the applicants.

### **Historical background of the phenomenon of forced migration in Africa.**

Possibly the best documented and most widely known incidence of large-scale forced migration experienced in the history of the African continent is the slave trade. The trans-Atlantic slave trade is unique in the history of forced migration in terms of its magnitude, the prolonged period of its practice, the suffering that its victims endured and the profit that it generated which laid the foundation of the early development of the capitalist world-economy (Wallerstein 1974). The victims of this form of forced migration were subjected to forced labour in plantations, mining and domestic work in the Americas and the Caribbean islands. As Eric Williams (cited in Sanderson 1991, 305) points out, slavery played a vital role in generating the profits that led to the great expansion of British capitalism and the financing of the Industrial Revolution.

The second current of forced migration affecting African settler societies (Algeria, Southern Africa, Kenya, and to some extent, the Belgian Congo) in significant proportion occurred during the colonial era. During this period, white settlers, or more precisely, colonial states acting in favour of settler interests, forced entire communities out of their properties, especially fertile land. While the largest share of land was re-allocated to white commercial farmers, land was also expropriated for mining purposes or in the course of the establishment of national parks. Uprooted communities were generally resettled on semi-arid land where they could not make their living; hence they were forced to sell their labour on farms or to seek employment in mines and industries. The effects of mass-expropriation and mass-displacement keep shaping the human geography and politics in former settler societies.

The post colonial Africa is faced by a complex refugee problem (as detailed below) and the effort to pave its path and affirm itself in the global politics. In refugee matters, the greatest challenge facing independent Africa is the ever-growing number of refugees and the generalized fatigue in handling the refugee problem. As Milner (2004, 16) points out, 'by the early 1980s, it was recognized that western donor governments were increasingly reluctant to fund lengthy care and maintenance programmes, and many governments began to seek ways of limiting their overseas commitments'.

In fact, independent Africa experienced a growing trend of armed conflicts in several parts of the continent which negatively affected the already fragile economic and development systems by destroying the few infrastructures inherited from colonial regimes, by killing thousands of civilians, and forcing others out of their homes. With several conflicts experienced on the continent focus was shifted from one refugee crisis to the other leaving several refugee problems unsolved. This resulted in cases of protracted refugees who spend ages in refugee settlements without being considered for permanent settlement in the host communities. Several conflicts experienced on the continent in the same period meant that many countries are at the same time refugee producing and receiving countries. For example, Rwanda has produced refugees on several occasions since 1960s but it has hosted Burundian and Congolese (DRC) refugees on several occasions in her independence period. The same can be said for Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Uganda, DRC, Congo, Angola, etc. In most cases, refugees settle in countries with limited means and resources to host them. As Adepoju (1982, 26) argues, 'in effect, the poorest countries in Africa have had to bear the heaviest burden imposed on them in the shape of refugees'. In some countries, failure to find a permanent solution to the refugee problem has pushed uprooted people to organize themselves to force their way back home through military means and this has caused more waves of population displacement. The cases of Rwanda and Burundi are good examples. Furthermore, defeated armed groups often joined "native" rebel groups in host countries, resulting in the spread of conflicts in whole regions. This is apparent in the Great Lakes Region involving Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and DRC; and in West Africa where the conflict spread from Liberia to Sierra Leone and further beyond.

During these prolonged periods of armed conflicts production was reduced considerably. In some countries such as Angola, Mozambique, Sudan, and many others, armed conflicts lasted more than 20 years during which a great proportion of the country's resources were channelled towards the war effort. Furthermore, because of prolonged insecurity, many people, mostly young, active and intellectual left Africa and settled in more stable countries, in Europe, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, but sometimes also in other more prosperous regions of the continent (notably South Africa). Thus, the African continent suffered a double loss due to forced migration, by forcing productive people out of their homes and confining

them in refugee camps; and by losing the intellectual human capital to the industrialized world.

Many economic and political analysts insist on the role played by western governments and/or multinational companies in armed conflicts on the African continent and their consequences on the human and economic development of the people. They base their accusation on the fact that most, if not all, weapons and other military equipments used in these destructive conflicts come from industrialized countries. The motive of sponsoring armed conflicts on the African continent being to have easy access to the minerals and other natural resources in the countries concerned. As Adepaju (1982, 24) explains, 'these conflicts [in independent Africa] find their roots in economic factors. Mineral rich areas are often tempted to secede, in most cases with active support by external interests'. The Biafra war in Nigeria and the secession war in Shaba in Congo (DRC) in the 1960s are clear examples of conflicts fuelled by outside forces for easy access to minerals and natural resources. These armed conflicts leave failed and ungovernable States with generalized insecurity such as armed gangs, land mines, reprisals, corruption, etc. Thus for many of these analysts Africa cannot embark on a meaningful development process without addressing the problem of forced migration and wider issues of security and democracy which are prerequisites for the effective mobilization of resources and local and foreign investment (Nabudere 2002).

### **The Refugee Problem in Africa**

Literature traces the beginning of the problem of refugees in Africa back to the period of struggles for independence. As Milner (2004, 10) points out, "while migration, both forced and voluntary, has been a defining feature of African history since pre-modern times, the emergence of the modern refugee phenomenon in Africa may be linked to the struggle for and attainment of independence by most African states in the late 1950s and early 1960s". The phenomenon of forced migration has characterized most African countries since the late pre-Independence period from the 1950s up until the 1980s. In many countries armed conflicts have characterized the post-Independence period and have been the main cause of population flights. Deng (1993) identifies civil and ethnic conflicts as the main causes of forced migrations in Sub-Saharan Africa.



Many political analysts argue that most of these post independence armed conflicts are a result of colonial legacy, the introduction of new socio-economic and political structures and the changing nature of the State (See on the latter Kraler 2005). In many African countries, colonial regimes practiced a system of differential and preferential treatment of Africans based on regional, tribal, status and ethnic differences. Most African countries inherited these colonial practices of division and exclusion (Anthony, 1999). Violent armed conflict experienced in several African countries in the post-Independence period are thus often the direct result of exclusionary policies pursued by newly independent regimes that in important ways can be seen as a continuation of similar colonial policies. The conflicts often opposed ruling groups trying to maintain the status quo on the one hand and excluded group rallying for change, on the other. Thus, in general, struggles over the control of political and economic power and concomitant massive human rights abuse, including widespread violence are the main cause of population flights in Sub Saharan Africa. Anthony (1999) cites Chad, Sudan, Rwanda, Burundi, and Uganda as examples of major refugee producing countries in sub-Saharan Africa, but the list can undoubtedly be prolonged.

Moreover, armed conflicts that cause population displacement are, in many instances, a result of failure or unwillingness of certain governments to resolve long-standing ethnic tensions (Chazan et al. 1999) or the tendency of certain governments to oppress particular population groups (Adepoju, 1989). For many socio-economic and developmental analysts armed conflicts and the resulting mass flight of refugees constitute the greatest challenge for economic development and the greatest obstacle to economic take off (Nabudere 2002).

The responses to the refugee problem as well as the management of refugee crises in Africa reflect this complex nature of the refugee phenomenon and the root causes of population displacement. The complexity of the refugee problem in Africa constitutes a great challenge for researchers, humanitarians as well as policy makers. The major challenge of addressing the refugee problem in Africa consists of harmonizing the perceptions and assumptions attached to the African refugees. The challenge also consists of the applicability of the traditional legal definition of the term 'refugee' as well as the rights that this legal definition implies as compared to the

practice observed in most countries hosting refugees. It also refers to the national asylum policies which are constantly moulded to suit the interests of the host countries at the expense of the refugees. In fact, as the number of refugees increases in Africa commitment to assist refugees decreases at local and international levels. The traditional warm welcome, compassion and generous reception of African host communities towards refugees decreases and is gradually replaced by xenophobic attitudes as it is observed in many countries hosting refugees (Rwamatwara 2003). As Kibreab (2003, 59) points out, 'the policies of nearly all refugee-hosting countries are designed to prevent rather than promote the integration of refugees'.

The refugee problem in Africa has undergone two major currents since the 1960s which are demarcated by the changes in national asylum policies. These changes were in turn prompted by the changing nature of causes of forced migration. The refugee policies formulated and implemented during this period of independent Africa are divided into two categories that Rutinwa (1999) characterizes as the 'open door' versus the 'closed door' policies. The first current, commonly referred to as the 'golden age' - which corresponds to Rutinwa's 'open door' policies - because of the relatively generous reception given to refugees by host countries, stretches from early 1960s to late 1980s (Milner 2004). This period was dominated by forced displacements of people fleeing effects of liberation struggles and the wars of secession within newly independent African States. Refugee producing countries because of armed liberation conflicts are Zimbabwe, Angola and Mozambique throughout the 1970s, South Africa and Namibia until late 1980s. Countries affected by secession armed conflicts that produced masses of refugees are Congo (DRC) and Nigeria in the 1960s and Ethiopia-Eritrea until 1990s. The 'golden age' period coincides with the ideological call for panafrikanism and African solidarity for the total liberation of Africa (Crisp 2000; Milner 2004). With this ideological call, not only States but also local communities felt the moral obligation of welcoming and hosting refugees from areas affected by liberation struggles and self-determination. This sentiment was shown, among others, by Tanzania, Zambia, Swaziland, Lesotho, towards Zimbabweans, Namibians, Mozambicans, Angolans and South Africans fighting for their respective independence (Milner 2004). During this period, issues of security and destructive effects associated with refugee flows were disregarded.

This period constituted a great challenge to the spirit of the refugee legal instruments which strictly forbids refugees to engage in political and military activities. In fact, during this period, not only host countries tolerated political and military activities in refugee camps but also offered them with training and military bases for their struggle for independence. This support to refugees involved in armed struggle for independence continued despite the reprisals from colonial regimes concerned. For example, Zambia and Mozambique were, on several occasions, victims of air strikes and bombing by the then Rhodesian regime because of their support to the Zimbabwean freedom fighters. Similarly, Swaziland, Lesotho and Mozambique were under constant threat from the Apartheid regime in South Africa because of their hosting and assistance to the black South African and Namibian freedom fighters. The 'golden Age' and the 'open door policy' faded away as these countries under colonial rule gained independence. The moral obligation to support the freedom fighters and the African solidarity for self-determination were no longer a key factor in the formulation and implementation of asylum policies. The new era of 'closed door' policies began.

Following this change in perception and sympathy towards refugees in Africa, the refugee cause and concern were no longer a priority and a preoccupation of the host countries. The latter were now concentrated to internal matters regarding the social, economic and political development policies. Attitudes and perceptions of African refugees both from host communities as well as from host government changed from the sympathetic ones to the xenophobic ones. Refugees from independent countries were viewed as a failure on the part of their respective governments hence not a direct responsibility of the host governments. The receiving countries started to complain about bearing the heavy burden of assisting refugees stemming from the failure and irresponsibility of another country and its inability to properly handle and resolve its own internal problems. Local communities also complained of having to share the available resources and services in short supply with these uninvited guests (Rutinwa 1999). Thus, refugees were henceforth viewed as a burden, a source of insecurity and criminality, a source of tension between the sending and the receiving countries and a source of tension between local communities. As Harrell-Bond (1986, 10) points out, one assumption which

is shared by both host governments and the international humanitarian agencies is that refugees constitute a problem, a burden.

During this period, the international community, UNHCR in particular, is called upon to play a major role to 'share the burden' of assisting refugees. This shows that the refugee problem is no longer a shared concern among African States united around the common goal of resolving the problem in the interest of the refugees. The refugee problem becomes a concern only when the interests of the host country are at stake. Following this change in attitudes, policy formulation for reception, management and assistance to refugees focuses on the refugees' control and containment and the fast way of getting rid of them by way of repatriation whether voluntary or forcible. The case of the 1994 Rwandan refugees forced repatriation from Tanzania is a starting point of this new lack of commitment to the refugee law (Rutinwa 1999). As Milner (2004, 4) rightly puts it, "the Rwandan repatriation exercise sent shockwaves through the refugee research and advocacy community".

The 'closed door policy' entails that the management of, and assistance to, refugees in Africa are guided by perceptions and assumptions deliberately conceived in order to control the refugees entry in the country or to discourage their stay by limiting their rights and/or by making their stay as uncomfortable as possible. For example, African refugees are perceived as individuals coming from rural background, less educated and with farming as their major activity. This perception has motivated receiving countries to settle refugees in remote rural areas far from major cities, supposedly to avail to them enough land to practice agriculture with an aim to assist the refugees achieve self-reliance. Examples of remote refugee settlements are found in Maheba (Zambia), Tongogara (Zimbabwe), Zaleka (Malawi), Kakuma (Kenya), Kissidougou (Guinea), etc. However, a close analysis of this practice shows that the policy of refugees' settlement in remote areas is not in the interest of the refugees but it is clearly a way of keeping refugees away, and to control their movements. As Kibreab (2003: 60) notes, 'nearly all refugee-hosting countries in the South have a policy of keeping refugees in segregated sites with little freedom of movement and residence'.

This policy is also meant to prevent frequent contact and interaction with locals which could lead to fast integration and permanent settlement of refugees. The policy is also intended to control and minimize the refugees' competition with locals over scarce resources and services such as

education, employment, health facilities, etc. The end result of this exclusive and controlling policies is that refugees in Africa cross several borders looking for better reception and hospitality (Rwamatwara 2003). Furthermore, refugees compelled to stay in remote refugee camps where the only possible sustaining activity is small scale farming tend to migrate to urban areas in search for alternative income generating activities. These are mainly the youth who cannot foresee any meaningful future by staying in a remote closed refugee camp and educated refugees who cannot use their skills while staying in a remote rural refugee camp. Once in urban centres, the majority of these refugees lead a destitute life which may compel some of them to engage in illegal activities for survival.

Moreover, African refugees are gradually perceived as constituting a security threat as they are thought to include dangerous elements that can compromise the State security and national integrity. Thus, by keeping refugees and controlling them in closed guarded camps, host countries claim to control and minimize the security incidents that are associated with uncontrolled movements of refugees. Although this assumption has some foundation in some cases such as the 1994 Rwandan refugee mass flows which caused insecurity in the host countries such as DRC (then Zaire) and Tanzania, the control of refugee movement is closely linked to the States' closed door asylum policies which aim at discouraging refugees to stay long in the country.

Furthermore, the change in refugee management policies has shifted the focus from the long term solution of the refugee problem in favour of the short term solution. In fact, during the 'golden age' many refugees were given citizenship and were helped through the total integration in local communities. Tanzania has been applauded for its exemplary policy of integrating refugees from Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and recently Somali refugees. However, in the new era, this policy has been put aside and Tanzania has shown yet another example by harassing and forcibly repatriating Rwandan refugees in 1996 (Milner 2004). In the 'closed door' policies era, countries prefer the short term solution which involves meeting the immediate needs of the refugees by giving them emergency aid calculated to ensure their survival and arrange for a return as soon as the conditions in country of origin improve (Adepoju 1982). Thus, host

countries are fast in convincing refugees to return back to their countries of origin even when the situation back home has not yet come back to normal.

### **The socio-economic and political impacts of forced migration in Africa**

One of the main issues today is the ever-increasing number of refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) on the continent and its negative impact on the social, economic, political and human development. As Cohen and Deng (1998, 1) put it, "large numbers of persons are regularly turned into 'refugees' and forced into a life of destitution and indignity". The figures produced by UNHCR in 2002 show that Africa produces and hosts 60% of the 17 million World's recognized refugees and internally displaced people.<sup>2</sup> According to UNHCR (2005), the total population of concern to UNHCR, namely, refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless, and other people of concern, increased from 17 million persons at the end of 2003 to 19 million by the end of 2004. Africa has the biggest share of this number with nearly three million refugees, often concentrated in regions with considerably inadequate capacities to host them. The current points of concentration of refugees in Africa are the great lakes region which is home to nearly one and half million refugees, East and Horn of Africa which hosts an estimate of one million refugees and the West African block which hosts half a million refugees (UNHCR, 2005).

Today, refugees flow from one African country to another in an uncontrolled manner. In some cases the flow of refugees is too huge and fast to be adequately managed. For example, the influx of Rwandese refugees was at the rate of 250,000 refugees crossing into Tanzania within 24 hours and in two months the number of refugees fleeing from Rwanda to Tanzania rose to nearly a million people, with a further almost two million crossing to Zaire (Rutinwa 1999). These mass displacements of people constitute a serious threat of security. They also affect economic, environmental and political stability of the transit and final destination countries. In fact, countries which host a big number of refugees have complained of the latter's destruction of environment in terms of tree-cutting in search of fire wood, water pollution, deforestation for setting up

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<sup>2</sup> Jeff Crisp in Refugee Survey Quarterly Vol.21, No 1 and 2, 2002, P.1

camps, etc (Mupedziswa 1993). These countries have also complained of spending considerable amounts of money over refugees which would have been used to improve the standard of living of their own citizens.

Moreover, the presence of refugees has caused unnecessary insecurity in the area of their settlement. The insecurity usually stems from the conflicts between refugees and local communities over the limited resources. More importantly, hosting refugees has been a source of political conflicts between the host country and the country of origin of the refugees. For example, the presence of the Rwandan refugees in DRC after the 1994 genocide in Rwanda created a political conflict between the two countries until today.

Furthermore, the increase in number of refugees and asylum seekers is accompanied by the fading generosity of African States regarding the acceptance, assistance and protection of refugees and asylum seekers. As Rutinwa (1999) rightly points out, "while the refugee problem has on the whole increased since the 1980s, African states have become less committed to asylum. African states now routinely reject refugees at the frontier or return them to their countries of origin even if the conditions from which they have fled still persist". The compassion and support shown by governments and host communities towards refugees in the past - victims of liberation struggles as well as victims of human rights abuse and ethnic cleansing - has disappeared. Both governments and communities are no longer prepared to sacrifice their economic resources and security for continuous cycles of waves of mass flights. The case of Tanzania is a good example. Tanzania has hosted and supported several freedom fighters from Zimbabwe, South Africa, Mozambique and Namibia. It also accepted and integrated large numbers of refugees from Rwanda and Burundi. In the context of the crisis of the 1990s, however, Tanzania's refugee policies radically changed. When hundreds of thousands Hutu refugees from Rwanda poured into Tanzania, the latter closed its doors to several thousand refugees and later forcibly repatriated many Rwandan refugees on grounds that they posed a security threat.

### **Durable solution to forced migration problem**

Addressing and solving the problem of refugees in Africa requires a good analysis of its root causes so as to address them and prevent the problem before it occurs. The root cause of forced migration is armed conflicts whose causes include poverty, civil strife, arms trade, violations of human rights and lack of accountability and democracy on the part of leaders (Rutinwa 1999). The 1994 Addis Ababa Declaration points out that armed conflicts and civil strife are the principal causes of refugees' flights in Africa. The document also mentions other factors which play a significant role in forced population displacement in Africa such as ethnic and religious intolerance, the abuse of human rights on a massive scale; the monopolization of political and economic power; refusal to respect democracy or the results of free and fair elections; resistance to popular participation in governance; and poor management of public affairs (Rutinwa 1999, 21). External causes are also worthy mentioning, such as arming and sponsoring rebel movements by external forces in order to have easy access to minerals and to find markets for their products, especially weapons; the unfair trade deals and unfair international economic system which leave many African states too poor to adequately attend to the needs of the citizens (Rutinwa 1999).

Addressing the above root causes requires a commitment of all stakeholders locally and globally. Some of the concrete measures to be taken include the democratization of African states in a manner that associates every citizen in the major decisions of public administration and governance. It also includes banning and criminalizing illegal sales of weapons. The major solution is also and primarily the sustainable development which eradicates extreme poverty, provides basic infrastructures and improves people's standard of living.

### **Concluding remarks**

This article highlighted the magnitude of the phenomenon of forced migration on the African continent. It traced its historical evolution and its different manifestation, intensity and atrocity in time and space across the continent. The article insisted on the negative effect of the phenomenon of



forced migration on socio-cultural, economic, ecological, demographic and political settings of the communities across the continent. It was also pointed out that the presence of a big number of refugees presents a security threat within the host country and between the countries concerned, namely the host country and the country of origin of the refugees. It was also highlighted that the increasing number of refugees instils a sentiment of fatigue on the part of host communities and countries in terms of accepting, receiving and protecting refugees. All these problems contribute negatively to the continent's effort towards a sustainable development. It was observed that to address the forced migration problem requires a good analysis and response to the root causes of the problem which are economic and political in nature. The article proposed preventive measures and solutions which include the democratization and good governance of Sub Saharan African regimes. The article emphasizes the importance of popular participation in the decision making process as means to limit and/or avoid divisions and internal conflicts. Finally but not least, external forces which take advantage of the conflicts to make bloody money must be adequately addressed.

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