

Linkages between livelihood opportunities and refugee-host relations: learning from the experiences of Liberian camp-based refugees in Ghana

Abstract

Means of achieving productive relationships between long-term refugees and their local host populations continue to tax governments, international agencies, development practitioners and academics. The common problems of tension, animosity, even outright conflict, in refugee-host relations add a substantial burden to the numerous other logistical difficulties faced by those engaged in refugee relief. Moreover, attitudes are hardening in many countries where the refugee problem shows little sign of abating. This paper combines recent livelihoods approaches to refugee studies with a social resilience framework to explore the interlinkages between refugee-host relations and refugee coping strategies in the Buduburam camp in Ghana. The reported experiences of camp residents and of the people with whom they interact in their efforts to make a living (NGO staff, government officials, traders etc.) illustrate the complex interplay between personal networks, livelihoods and broader relations between refugee and host populations. We draw particular attention to language skills, diaspora linkages and the impact of illicit and/or innovative livelihood strategies of refugees. Despite the enormous emphasis refugees in the camp place on earning their own living, some groups are less able or less willing than others to build the social networks to the host population that might allow them access to regular employment. Other factors, including the massive size of the camp population, the deep poverty of Gomoa district where the camp is situated, and the mismatch between the urban character of the majority of the refugee population and local (agricultural) labour demand, contribute to less than optimal relations with the host population.

Introduction

Means of achieving productive relationships between long-term refugees and their local host populations continue to tax governments, international agencies, development practitioners and academics. The common problems of tension, animosity, even outright conflict, in refugee-host relations add a substantial burden to the numerous other logistical difficulties faced by those engaged in refugee relief. Moreover, attitudes are hardening in many countries where the refugee problem shows little sign of abating. This paper contributes to current debates by combining recent livelihoods approaches to refugee studies with a social resilience framework to explore the interlinkages between diverse refugee-host social networks and the shaping of refugee livelihood options. It also considers the way these interlinkages impact on and are impacted on by government, NGO and donor interventions and by pre-existing local livelihood opportunities.

Social resilience is a relatively new concept which emphasises the importance of social context in coping with adversity. It can be defined as the ability to cope with and adapt to environmental and social change mediated through appropriate institutions. In the context of people forced into refugee situations, a social resilience framework can be used to understand how people make use (or fail to make use) of social networks, along with social and cultural institutions (formal and informal) to deal with the situations in which they find themselves. The importance of moving beyond a purely individual / psychological approach to understanding the experiences of people in conflict situations has been highlighted in the literature (Boyden and

Mann 2000; Hosin 2001; Farwell 2001 etc.). It is argued that an emphasis purely on the individual as the unit of investigation risks missing the ways in which relationships between people can either mitigate or intensify the experiences of conflict. Usually, emphasis is placed on how social networks operate within the refugee community, but social networks at the refugee-host interface can have particular significance and value, especially where the refugee situation is protracted (defined as those lasting over five years and with no immediate prospect of solution). By combining a livelihoods perspective with a social resilience framework in this study of refugee-host relations, we are able to disentangle some of the complexities involved in developing a survival strategy which can cope with the exigencies and uncertainties of refugee life.

Our research is mostly set in the context of a refugee camp - Buduburam in Ghana - but it also draws on the experiences of the broader community of NGOs, government officials, a few 'integrated' refugees living outside the camp, and others with whom camp inhabitants interact in their efforts to make a living and reduce their vulnerability. The principal aim of the paper is to explore the way camp-based refugee livelihoods are shaped, in the context of complex social relations between refugees and their hosts. We draw particular attention to language skills, gender and generational differences and diaspora linkages. Following a brief review of theoretical perspectives on linkages between livelihood and refugee-host relations, research methods and the history of Liberian refugee settlement in Ghana, we consider the interplay between personal networks and broader relations with the host population, through an examination of livelihood strategies. Finally, we offer some specific, albeit tentative, policy recommendations.

Theoretical perspectives on the linkages between livelihoods and refugee-host relations

There is now a considerable literature on refugee-host relations and the impacts of refugees and forced migration on host countries: much of this focuses on livelihood opportunities, constraints and competition, because livelihood issues are so central to refugee-host relations in most contexts. Circumstances in the host country will vary for both host and refugee populations, in the first place depending on whether refugees are put into camps, or whether local integration into rural areas and/or urban centres is the favoured strategy. There are studies which show that integration into local communities can be very effective for both refugees and their hosts, but these tend to relate only to specific contexts: where population densities are relatively low such that there are labour shortages: where the refugees belong to the same ethno-linguistic group as their host populations, or where there has been a history of movement between the source and host regions (Leach on Liberians in Sierra Leone, 1992; Bakewell on Angolans in Zambia, 2000, 2002). In these situations, refugees are able to build adequate livelihoods without generating excessive competition and consequent antagonisms with local populations. Integration into large cities or more populous rural regions is often less successful, both for refugees and their hosts, especially where (as often happens) this leads to resource and associated livelihood struggles and/or the host government imposes complex administrative regulations which hamper refugee opportunities to make a living (Black and Sessay 1997).

Large camps may be particularly unsuccessful, in terms of their impact on hosts, refugees and refugee-host relations (Harrell-Bond 2000) precisely because the impact

a large body of refugees together in one place may rapidly become apparent on the ground. Some of the ensuing discordance may be due to environmental impacts such as vegetation clearance, fuelwood depletion, etc. (Martin 2005), which may have indirect livelihood consequences for the host population, while direct social impacts may include undermining local welfare services in the host country by paying higher wages and luring away qualified staff. Moreover, the perceived benefits of regular handouts of food and other goods in the camp can incite envy in poor host communities (Lawrie and van Damme 2003). Some now argue that camps, while administratively convenient for UNHCR and host governments, by treating inhabitants as dependent passive victims, are a violation of human rights (Macchiavello 2003). However, large camps continue to be the reality of life for very many refugees, including those who form the focus of our study.

Whether refugees are in camps or integrated in local communities, Akokpari (1998) and others point to host governments' perceptions of dangers from refugee influxes, such as excessive resource pressures and associated environmental degradation, the potential of refugees to form a security threat (Jacobsen 2002), and, of particular significance to this discussion, the possibility that lacking access to formal employment, they may swamp the informal sector or move into illicit activities (sex work, drugs etc.). The innovative livelihood strategies of refugees (rather than any 'dependency syndrome') may become the root of host community antipathies (Kibreab 1994, Jacobsen 2002). The differential impact of refugees on individual groups within the host community has also been observed. The potential impact on the livelihoods of poorer hosts was raised two decades ago by Chambers (1986), who emphasised the particular dangers in land-scarce, labour-abundant regions. A more recent study by Whitaker (2002) of refugees in western Tanzania emphasises the considerable diversity of experience in terms of impact on host livelihoods, showing that host experiences are strongly influenced by their gender, age, class, as well as by settlement pattern, local socio-economic conditions and local host-refugee relations. Issues around social relationships between Liberian refugees and their Ghanaian hosts, the linkages between host relations and local socio-economic conditions, and the impact of illicit and/or innovative livelihood strategies of refugees, are the subject of the discussion which follows.

Studying social networks and related livelihood issues in and around Buduburam camp

Our findings are based principally on a four-month period of field research, mostly conducted within the camp, in 2005. The camp-based research used a multi-method approach: twelve focus groups discussions with young Liberians (each with 6-10 people, mostly gender homogenous) seven with older Liberians; 30 in-depth interviews with inhabitants and other key informants (including 8 life histories); one camp inhabitant's detailed daily diary (kept for two months), photo diaries kept by camp secondary school students (only two were returned) and researchers' participant observation, including their ethnographic diaries of camp life. We also drew on previous socio-economic studies of Ghanaians in the same district by one of the authors, interviewed Ghanaians such as the local area traditional chief, the acting local political leader and various NGO staff working inside the camp, and solicited views from NGO workers and volunteers of other nationalities assisting camp refugees. Subsequently, we held six focus groups with Ghanaians: one with residents close to the camp, one with traders at nearby Kasoa market, two with younger and older

groups of Ghanaians (separately) in Accra, and two with younger and older groups in Kumasi. Regular meetings were held at the camp in 2005 with a small consultative group of key stakeholders; mostly Liberians but also some Ghanaians based in the camp. This was followed by two workshops with camp residents and other stakeholders, one to review our preliminary findings, a second after the fieldwork to review our draft final report to the funder and UNHCR. These enabled camp inhabitants to comment on the findings, and to make amendments and clarifications. The findings presented here express the best approximation of the felt and lived reality for camp inhabitants we could hope to achieve as outsiders, while recognising that the key stakeholders identified may not fully represent all views (Jacobsen and Landau 2003).

Although the research was conducted by two UK and two Ghanaian academics, supported by a Ghanaian NGO leader, there was also a strong input from two Liberian field assistants recruited within the camp. All interviews were conducted in English, since Liberian-English is the main camp language. The Liberian assistants were present at the majority, but not all, camp interviews, and at all focus group discussions involving Liberians. While this raised questions of confidentiality, it was essential to our access. Ethical issues are a substantial concern in refugee research (Jacobsen and Landau 2003). They were reviewed prior to the field study by our university ethics committee, at the camp Consultative Group meetings at the outset of the project, and by the research team during the progress of the research.

The mix of Ghanaians and Liberians in our research team was particularly fruitful in exploring some of the perceived tensions between the two communities, perhaps helped by the fact that this was not initially a prime focus of our research, which centred on the social networks and resilience of Liberian refugee youth and intergenerational relations within the camp [XXX forthcoming]. Our Ghanaian research collaborators started out themselves with concerns about Liberian refugees (reflective of views held by the wider population in Ghana and a local press which has become relatively negative) but their perspectives changed substantially as work proceeded in the camp and they participated in its daily life. Discussions between our Ghanaian and Liberian colleagues, which developed and deepened as the work progressed, emphasised the importance of understanding the complexities of the interlinkages between Ghanaians and Liberians and associated livelihood concerns and outcomes. This led to additional research with Ghanaians, notably the focus group discussions within the camp locality and two major urban centres.

Setting the context: Liberian refugees in Ghana and the development of Buduburam camp

Liberian refugees fleeing civil unrest and persecution have been arriving in Ghana for two decades. When the first wave of refugees arrived in Ghana, a National Reception Committee was quickly constituted, made up of the Ghanaian Ministry of Mobilisation and Social Welfare along with several NGOs. Accustomed to dealing with much smaller numbers of refugees, largely from South Africa, Ghana was unprepared to handle the great influx of Liberian refugees, and called upon the UNHCR for assistance. To accommodate the refugees, the Ghanaian government made land available at Buduburam in Gomoa District, 35km west of Accra and the Buduburam Refugee Settlement was established in 1990. The majority of Liberians

were settled in Buduburam, though small numbers went to Accra and other towns, as well as to a much smaller camp near the border with Côte d'Ivoire (Dick 2002a, b).

It is important to note that Gomoa district where Buduburam camp is located, although relatively close to Accra, is one of Ghana's poorest districts. Earlier work in this coastal savanna district emphasised agricultural problems associated with low and unreliable rainfall, high input costs and poor roads. Another problem, and one relevant to our discussion, is labour shortage. A vicious circle pertains in Gomoa whereby youth labour out-migration (to areas of cash crop cultivation in the forest zones or to urban areas) is encouraged by the relatively underdeveloped state of agriculture, and labour shortages help perpetuate low productivity. From the agricultural labour perspective, the influx of refugees might seem advantageous; a viewpoint supported by the literature we cited earlier. However, the majority of Liberian refugees in Buduburam are ex-urbanites and other issues, discussed below, have intervened to negate the potentially advantageous demographic context.

In the early years material assistance to refugees at Buduburam was provided under the UNHCR's administrative direction, in partnership with a variety of NGOs. This happened at the request of the Ghanaian government, who found themselves unable to meet the needs of the large influx of refugees from Liberia. However, after elections were held in Liberia in 1997, UNHCR Ghana shifted its focus from humanitarian support to voluntary repatriation (Dick 2002b), but the vast majority decided to remain at Buduburam. During this period, material assistance was significantly reduced to all but the most vulnerable refugees, and by June 2000, all UNHCR assistance was withdrawn to Liberian refugees, as part of UNHCR regional policy (Dick 2002, b).

Unfortunately, the conflict in Liberia re-intensified in the early 2000s, and many Liberians had to flee their homes once more, leading to many new arrivals in Ghana, particularly at Buduburam and in July 2002, the UNHCR re-established a presence there (UNHCR Ghana 2003). UNHCR no longer gives individual humanitarian assistance to asylum seekers and refugees in the camp, with the exception of "vulnerable" groups: children and the elderly. Instead, the aim is to "[work] on a community basis to strengthen resources towards greater self-reliance" (UNHCR Ghana, 2003). In addition to support from the UNHCR and other international agencies, refugees in Buduburam have themselves formed a large number of community-based organisations (CBOs), including the Liberian Welfare Council, which has overall day-to-day responsibility for managing the camp.

A number of studies have taken place in the Buduburam Refugee Settlement, including two particularly comprehensive reports by Dick (2002a, b), which focus largely on the ability of the refugees in Buduburam to become self-reliant in the face of UNHCR's withdrawal of humanitarian support. The principal message of these two reports is that self-reliance for refugees in protracted exile is both desirable and possible. Although not all refugees have equal economic opportunities, and the obstacles to self-reliance for some are considerable, she argues that, on the whole, Liberians have been able to support themselves adequately since the gradual withdrawal of humanitarian support. We will return to these conclusions towards the end of this paper.

By the time we started our research in 2005, the situation in Buduburam was rather different from that observed by Dick. The number of refugees and asylum seekers living on the camp had more than doubled (to around 40,000) since her work in 2000/2001. Unlike the situation observed by Dick, in which the majority of refugees in Buduburam had been living for some years under UNHCR support, and thus in a reasonable position to become self-reliant as it was gradually withdrawn, the more recent arrivals came at a time when basic humanitarian support was not provided, external support was insufficient, and Ghanaian hostility had emerged; they have had to fend for themselves from the outset. Camp residents differentiate between those who arrived in the early 1990s, and those who came much later (“first semester” and “second semester”), in terms of their livelihood opportunities and ability to cope with living in exile. For this reason, it is important to re-visit the situation in Buduburam today, since the self-reliance advocated by Dick may not be achievable by all. In particular, some of the young people who have arrived unaccompanied by family over the last few years may be especially vulnerable. Major problems of camp life reported in 2005 include unavailability of jobs (mostly limited to the informal sector); cost of accommodation; cost of education, coping with healthcare and other living costs; loss of family members and support of elders (such that many of the youth are living alone and support themselves; the numerous girl-mothers are particularly vulnerable) and insufficient external support, including recent Ghanaian hostility.

The situation in Liberia is gradually improving, following successful elections in 2005, but economic collapse, extreme poverty and threats to peace and security still prevail and corruption is reportedly rife, reinforced by pervasive unemployment and desperation (McIntosh 2007; Savage 2007). Voluntary repatriation to Liberia was offered by UNHCR, from October 2004, but not actively promoted till February 2006. The repatriation package was not considered financially conducive and some would be in physical danger if they returned. By July 2006, 3,500 had returned home, but the majority are simply staying at the camp, seemingly unwilling either to move back to Liberia or to integrate into Ghanaian society (<http://thevisiononline.net/?p=522>, last accessed 05/09/2007). There are currently around 38,000, mostly Liberian, refugees at Buduburam (UNHCR July 26 2007, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/news/opendoc.htm?tbl=NEWS&id=44c7783e> last accessed 05/09/07).

The US has represented a beacon of hope: many Liberians have moved there over the last few decades and it is the source of the majority of remittance largesse. However, since 9/11 immigration has tightened substantially, and the USA and other donor countries are turning their efforts to re-construction in Liberia, rather than accepting further refugees. Thus, although for most young people especially, America is the preferred option and Liberia a poor second, their dreams are increasingly unlikely to be realised¹. It is unlikely that camp demographics will change dramatically in the near future since most younger people are set on resettlement in a third country (which is unlikely to happen rapidly), while older people who might return to Liberia are immobilised by their fear of conditions at home and of returning empty-handed.

¹ A recent report suggests that 3,600 Liberians living in the US who came there under a special immigration category, Temporary Protected Status, may even be forced to return to Liberia. <http://thevisiononline.net/?m=200708>, sourced from US National Public Radio, accessed 05/09/2007.

Getting by: livelihood strategies in Buduburam

Our field research in 2005 shows that making a livelihood as a refugee living in Buduburam is extremely difficult. Many of the people we interviewed in focus groups seem to have very little to eat, because of the cost. Free food (provided by the World Food Programme) was reintroduced in 2003, but only ‘vulnerable groups’- children and the elderly- are eligible. (The ground maize provided is an unfamiliar food, generally disliked and sold or bartered to obtain the Liberian staple, rice, or cassava). Camp inhabitants estimate that, of the refugees currently resident in Buduburam, just over 10% are employed in the camp formal / service sector, and informal economic activities, such as petty trading, and communications (space-to-space) inside and outside the camp, and an estimated 20% personally receive remittances from abroad. This leaves the majority (around 60%) with no regular source of income, though many are assisted at least occasionally through the remittances received by others within their family or social network. This makes living very difficult and compels some to engage in risky and illegal activities, such as commercial sex work. While these figures are based only on informants’ estimates, they give some indication of the perceived scale of livelihood problems in the camp.

The fact that people need a Ghanaian residence permit in order to get a formal job outside the camp, but then their refugee status is denied, was presented by camp inhabitants as a major problem. The actual situation, according to UNHCR staff in Accra is somewhat different: recognised refugees under the 19992 Ghana Refugee Law can apply for and obtain work permits. However, the process of applying for a work permit is cumbersome and requires refugees to apply to the Ghana Immigration Service through the Ghana Refugee Board/Ministry of Interior with a national passport or Convention Travel Document, a job offer from a recognised body, a CV and a letter explaining the request. UNHCR reportedly helps applicants to process the applications and points out that ‘casual, unskilled labour in the informal sector does not in practice require work permits’ (Pers. communication, UNHCR staff member, Accra, 3 May 2006).

A few well qualified Liberians (nurses, teachers) get work in the camp but for most the opportunities available are extremely limited. Even those with qualifications (such as a health assistant certificate), including teachers, are unable to find work. According to Dick (2002b:18), the Ghanaian government does not recognise Liberian medical qualifications and requires health professionals to attend training workshops which they cannot afford. The majority of those resident in the camp work either within its boundaries, or in close proximity, in the informal sector. Common areas of work range from running one of the many small study classes for children and youth which take place after school in the camp and offer a small income to young students and those who have graduated (around 20,000 cedis per month for primary level assistance), to renting bicycles (men), carpentry and masonry work (men), plaiting hair (girls), retailing goods (e.g. soft drinks, enamelware) for others or on their own account in the camp (both sexes), or simply selling well water or washing clothes (mostly girls). Some of the hardest physical jobs include working as porters and wheelbarrow pushers on construction sites, carrying ice blocks and brick making, all of which tasks are done women as well as men: *‘I must push before I eat’* (19 year old girl). Even very young children help their parents by pushing heavy wheelbarrows at the camp market and at construction sites to earn money for the family.

The camp market is another potential area for income earning, but again there are limited opportunities. The market includes both Liberian and Ghanaian traders (from Accra mostly), but the majority are Liberian women. Liberian women traders sell greens and garden vegetables and some dried goods in order to buy their preferred food, rice. Within the camp market and elsewhere within and around the camp, the opportunities for making a living through trade are inevitably limited, given the numbers of would-be traders involved. There is a limit to the number of businesses the camp can support, especially given the very low average income of its inhabitants.

Although trade within the camp offers some a modest livelihood, the main regional market at Kasoa seems to be inaccessible to most camp inhabitants, except as a source of goods for retail at the camp or as a site for plaiting hair (mostly done by young Liberian women). The camp inhabitants were reportedly initially denied space at Kasoa by the (Ghanaian) market association there because of overall shortage of space in the market: this led to the subsequent grant of a market on land by the camp by the local village chief. Those who try nowadays to retail at Kasoa reportedly simply do not get customers coming to buy from them, in part because of the language problem, discussed below. However, it is possibly also a matter of being blocked by the Kasoa market association, though there is some disagreement among Liberian informants on this issue.

Paradoxically, refugees perceive opportunities for earning a living through farming to be limited, despite the agricultural labour shortages in Gomoa district (though many grow a small quantity of vegetables for home consumption). Some people, young and old, have managed to earn income by growing crops for sale, such as potato green, a product much favoured by Liberians, on land near the camp. However, the land mostly seems to have been given out now by its Ghanaian owners, often without charge: for newer residents the opportunities are rare.

Some Liberians who have managed to access the Ghana education system have obtained jobs outside the camp in the formal sector, but others who obtained entry at Legon or Cape Coast university are reportedly back in the camp because they could not get jobs. Low self-esteem is considered part of the problem: *'it is a problem of mentality, they don't think they will get anything because they are Liberian. So often it's their own perception, not Ghanaian blocking'* (Ghanaian NGO older male manager). One specific example was cited by a Liberian man who heard a few boys arguing. *'I advised [one of the boys] .. to go to computer school. The boy said, "I'm in Ghana so I can't do a job with skills".'* (man, late 20s).

Finally it is necessary to emphasise a point touched on above: the crucial role of remittances from family members abroad – particularly those in the USA. These are an important source of financial support, their benefit extending far beyond the 20% of camp inhabitants estimated to receive direct regular remittances. A regular source of envy and dispute, it is difficult to see how the camp economy could continue to function without them, given the extreme constraints that Liberians face in finding employment outside of Buduburam.

Livelihoods and illegality

A range of illegal and potentially harmful livelihood strategies are practiced by camp inhabitants: prostitution, selling drugs, robbery (including armed robbery), illegal

electrical connections and gambling. Such activities may have been less evident when Dick reported in 2002, though she noted some “prostitution and concubinage” (Dick 2002b:6) and also observed particular problems associated with ‘The Gap’ (four areas mostly occupied by ex-combatants), a zone considered by some camp residents as spoiling the reputation of Liberians among Ghanaians (ibid: 21)².

Inevitably these activities raise hostility in the Ghanaian host community, and were raised in every focus group discussion held with Ghanaians (though Marijuana dealing in some cases seems to be based on supplies from Ghanaian producers). The youths who referred to (and in some cases admitted themselves pursuing) such illegal activities suggested this was precipitated by hunger, but *‘you also want to wear what your friends are wearing so you do things you are not supposed to do’* (19 year old boy, living alone). Older people also referred to the materialism of youth as the impetus for illicit activities. It was suggested that when overseas remittances stop, this is often a trigger for men to move into petty crime such as ‘money doubling’. This may lead on to more serious crimes. In a focus group discussion with young men about fears for the future, the desire to keep out of criminal activity was reiterated by most.

For many young girls, the only solution in the face of the pressures on them to support parents (and possibly children too) seems to be prostitution: *‘now 16-year old girls are supporting their parents and parents don’t want to know where they get the money because they use it. It was different before the war’* (31 year old woman). In some cases girls are involved in prostitution with the agreement/acceptance of their partners because it is necessary to buy food. Many older people in the camp are extremely distressed by this particular problem. One volunteer with the HIV/Aids outreach programme recounted the story of how he encountered a woman who would not let them meet with her girls, *‘because we may be preventing them from going for money for her through prostitution’*.

Gender and generational differences in livelihood opportunities

It is widely agreed by both sexes that it is easier for refugee girls and women to earn a living than for men. Prostitution (more in Accra, but also in the camp) is one of the most hazardous yet accessible opportunities: *‘Ladies can smile and find support. Boys have to go through hard labour’* (young Liberian man working at camp NGO). This same point was made in numerous interviews with men. Some argue that women’s better access to job opportunities creates serious tensions in the home because men feel they are unable to fulfil the traditional breadwinner role: *‘so your control over the house is slim’*. On the other hand, this does not prevent the gender stereotyping and sexual harassment which is such a common feature of camp life.

Access to work seems to vary to some extent with age as well as gender. Many older women in the camp make tiny sums by trading charcoal, water and other basic items. The ability to speak some Twi is probably an important factor enabling most to do so. Older men find it hard to obtain jobs unless they are educated and can find work as

² However, our observations in the various ‘Gap’ areas suggested that although some Ghanaians frequent them, they are mostly relatively peaceful areas (though marijuana smoking is fairly ubiquitous there).

part of the camp organisation. Young people with no capital to trade and little experience of trading usually have to depend on their physical strength and tend to work as porters, pushing trucks, making bricks, etc. For girls the only other option may be hair plaiting, or prostitution. For those young people who are living in the camp on their own, with no local support network except for friends they have made at the camp, the situation is often especially dire. Even for those with family, the pressures can be intense. In many cases, young people have to work to support their parents: *'my mother, she begged people for food and I was ashamed so I decided to work to bring money in'* (girl, 19 years); *'when I lost my mother I started being adult because my father was having to support three children. I was 15'* (girl, 17 years). In some cases parents or family members are too traumatised to work: *'since the war she's never seen any of the[other] children. She thinks every day about where her children are. So I live with mother but I must provide for her and myself. So I can't go to school* (25 year old, in the camp since 2000). Many of the young girls we interviewed had young babies, which made it particularly difficult for them to undertake long working days, unless they have family in the camp to help.

Both older people and youth suggested that the failure of older people to support their children after the first few years in camp was a major cause of inter-generational problems. The point that *'the respect got lost because you can't feed your children'* (42 year-old unemployed woman) was reiterated over and over again in our interviews with older men and women. Given the limited employment available, male identity seems especially threatened because of lack of work, whereas women, we were told, can look after the children, cook, wash clothes etc. For men, boredom is reportedly a big issue: *'some do nothing, play ludo, a very pathetic situation'* (30 year old man). Idleness, it was argued at a focus group of older men, leads to evil.

It is difficult to ascertain the gender and generational distribution of remittance benefits. Many young camp inhabitants spend time at the internet cafes, searching for overseas sponsors/support, and although one group of youth argued that remittances are more commonly received by older people with children abroad, there was ample interview evidence that young people are in a particularly strong position to receive remittances, being more adept at learning the communication skills needed to maintain (and create) relationships overseas: "Everybody goes to Western Union" (focus group with young men). Our interviews suggest that remittances received by young and old circulate widely within the camp, across gender and generation, through gifts and loans to family and friends and through purchases in camp-based enterprises (as also reported in Dick 2002b:6).

The evolving relationship with Ghanaian hosts and its impact on livelihoods

'Ghanaians think Liberians have money. Liberians hide their suffering [and] poverty- it's self-pride'. (Ghanaian NGO staff member)

The relationship between Liberian refugees and their hosts appears to mirror similar experiences in other countries, whereby initial kindness has given way to growing hostility, commonly related to resource scarcity and security problems (Jacobsen 2002: 591). Because economic opportunities for the Liberian refugees in Ghana are very limited, and even essential public services are fee-paying, the majority of the inhabitants of Buduburam rely on social networks and other forms of social support to provide them with material or other kinds of help in times of need. Social networks to

local Ghanaian host communities can play a crucial role in achieving livelihood improvement, but the potential and willingness to develop and nurture such networks depends on a range of factors relating to refugees' age, sex and broader attitudes to residence in Ghana and to corresponding attitudes in the host population, as we illustrate below.

Ghanaians and Liberians have interacted for centuries and many Ghanaians were resident in Liberia before the war started. Perhaps in part because of this familiarity (especially through trade, less commonly through intermarriage), in the early years when Liberian refugees entered Ghana much help was offered to them by local people and relations with the Ghanaian population in general were excellent. Some people at the camp were reportedly even evacuated from Liberia by the Ghana government when they were evacuating Ghanaian nationals. Before the camp was built, villagers at Buduburam took Liberians into their own homes: *'they accepted me and opened their hearts to me'* (30 year old woman). We heard that many unaccompanied children were taken by Ghanaians to live with them and are *'now growing up in Ghanaian homes'*.

Reports of individual kindnesses, especially in the early years of the camp, are numerous. One boy described how he started to earn a small income from growing potato-greens on land belonging to an elderly Ghanaian man near the camp. When the man first saw the boy with other Liberians on his land he fetched the police, but *'we talked to him and then he understood'*. The land had been used illegally by sand-winners and he was pleased when the cultivation stopped it. He not only allowed the Liberians to farm but did not charge them for using the land. Another man had lived with a Ghanaian woman in a nearby village and she had found him land to lease. Throughout his time there he had *'very cordial relations.... I was put in total charge [of the house]'*. Another man explained how an elder in the Pentecostal church in Kasoa had lent him mattresses for himself and his children, visited him regularly, gave him money, food and advice, even bought him an alarm for his door. Many others mentioned being given goods to sell on [easy] credit, being rented houses at reduced rates, and children being sponsored in school by Ghanaians: *'I met a Ghanaian who is paying my daughter's school fees. This is the [only] positive thing I have'* (38 year old unemployed man).

Formal institutions including Ghanaian schools and churches also continue to play a vital role. At first the Ghanaian churches brought food on rota to the camp and took close care and interest in individual families. They still help directly and indirectly through links with the many Liberian churches at the camp. The churches not only provide for spiritual needs but also give material help: *'they always help you if you are in need'* (daughter of Liberian pastor), *'they supply us with clothes for church'* (young girl). Many camp children are at Ghanaian schools, where they pay the same fees as Ghanaians (as opposed to higher fees for foreigners). These schools reportedly have better facilities and more qualified staff than those on the camp. However, in nursing schools in Ghana, Liberians have to pay overseas fees. Refugees at the University of Ghana are eligible for reduced fees (40% of the overseas rate), but most cannot afford even that.

Many positive individual interactions continue between camp inhabitants and Ghanaians. Liberians interact with Ghanaians if they attend Ghanaian schools outside

the camp, sometimes through trading in markets, through sporting activities, through religious meetings and on excursions to the beach. Such meetings may lead to friendship, invitations to funerals and weddings and to material help. Some people on the camp also have temporary liaisons with Ghanaians and may have children from these temporary unions, though there is reportedly only limited intermarriage with Ghanaians. Nonetheless, we were widely informed by both Ghanaians and Liberians that, in recent years, some of these good relations between Liberians and Ghanaians have deteriorated. Thus, whereas the Ghanaian churches at first brought food on rota to the camp, took close care and interest in individual families etc., their connections have tended to cool as crime increased and reports about wife-snatching by Liberians grew. This cooling of relations is of major concern to many Liberians at the camp. During initial discussions about potential participants for our end of study workshop we were advised by the chairwoman of the Welfare Council that the crucial invitees were the press, *'to correct wrong perceptions of Ghanaians about camp inhabitants'*.

Perspectives of camp inhabitants regarding relationships with Ghanaians

On the Liberian side, opinions in the camp vary as to the scale of conflict or hostility between Liberians and local Ghanaians, with some blaming the media for exaggerating reports of hostility. In general, however, explanations for the deterioration in Libero-Ghanaian relationships among different age groups are rather similar and tend to put more emphasis on Liberian than Ghanaian failings.

Older Liberians argued that style, manners and actual and perceived vice perpetrated by the Liberian refugees at the camp were often at the heart of current antagonisms, which appear to be directed particularly at Liberian youth. Incidents such as theft of Ghanaian traders' goods in the camp market bring *'hassle in the heart'* (Liberian middle-aged male trader). An elderly Liberian man who works in a formal position at the camp contrasted Ghanaian society where there is *'humbleness and respect for adults'* with young Liberians who had been brought up very differently. This lack of understanding of the need for respect among Liberian youth was reiterated by a number of older Liberians. Trauma and loss of parental care were raised as major causes, though a number of older people also suggested this was compounded by long-standing differences between Ghanaians and Liberians associated with temperament (the greater impatience of most Liberians), different traditions of chieftaincy (less honour to traditional leaders in Liberia), the fascination of youth with everything Western/American, lack of national identity and a different style of (colonial-influenced) education.

The problem of conspicuous consumption by some young Liberians was specifically identified by older Liberians as an issue they felt affected relations with Ghanaians. They suggested it raised resentment among Ghanaians who seemed to perceive that Ghana was subsidising the camp. They would thus charge Liberians more in the market *'because they think you are getting free money'* (Consultative Group meeting, April 2005).

Younger Liberians were also aware of the way Liberian attitudes and their own interaction led to hostility in the host community: *'our people need to be educated so they know when you are a refugee you have some limits; you don't have rights over the original owners of the land'* (Consultative group, April 2005). The view that Liberians are violent people was expressed by young Liberians too: *'Liberians*

nowadays are violent by nature....the attitude of being polite has gone away... the system is a tarnished system' (young Liberian man). A few referred to the need to learn from the host nation.

There was some concern expressed among younger Liberians that they were unwittingly breaking Ghanaian rules and conventions. One young man told a sorry story: *'if there is maybe a law or something they don't want us to do they should tell us so we know it's against the norms. Unknowingly, you fall into the trap. I was using private KVIP [lavatory].. I went far into the bush but I didn't know there was a law not to go there. I saw them surrounding me... they said they were taking me to the Chief. I said sorry, I didn't know. I'd been friends with some of them before, I'd interacted with some of them. They beat me with sticks. I still have bruises'*. He suggested that the local Chiefs needed to ensure the village youths told the camp when issues arose.

Failures and misunderstandings were observed (by younger and older Liberians) to have occurred on the Ghanaian side too, but were generally seen as a secondary component of current tensions. Some Ghanaians were accused of insensitivity, reminding the Liberians about what they *'had done in the past'* (referring to atrocities committed during the war), sometimes merely as a (tasteless) joke. One Liberian man described an incident when he was getting off a bus one day and a man heard his accent and started insulting him about Liberians eating government money and being stupid people. Others on the bus stopped the Ghanaian when he began to physically attack the man. In some cases the antagonism is related to Liberians being cheated by Ghanaians: a number of stories of Ghanaians impersonating Liberians in order to access US resettlement programmes were reported. Others put the breakdown of Liberian-Ghanaian relationships down to mutual misunderstandings.

Although Liberians did not often specifically identify livelihoods as a cause of tension, on closer inspection this appears to be a highly significant sub-theme, associated with both direct competition for jobs and indirect competition for livelihoods through access to land and to migration opportunities to the US. Whatever the cause of dispute, the impact seems to be to encourage a tendency, especially among youth, to stay close to the camp and in some cases to avoid interaction with Ghanaians altogether.

Ghanaian perspectives of Liberia camp refugees

The camp Commandant, a Ghanaian, observed: *'because of the trauma they've been through it is better to be humble and patient and reach out to their needs'*, but Ghanaian attitudes on and off the camp are often less understanding. The notion that the refugees may steal Ghanaians wives or husbands (NGO staff interview; focus group with older professionals, Kumasi) and a spate of armed robberies on the Cape Coast road which reportedly forced the Ghanaian army to move in to secure the road are widely cited by Ghanaians as the cause of recent concerns. There is also a widespread view among Ghanaians that Liberian refugees are well off by comparison with many Ghanaians in the neighbouring area (perhaps exacerbated by the fact that Gomoa district is one of the poorest in Ghana). Many Ghanaians observe the visible evidence of remittance wealth. A cursory visit to the camp can reinforce such perceptions, since people dress well (the youth mostly in western dress), often pay

great attention to keeping their clothes well pressed, and there are many communication centres, bars, nightclubs etc.

A male Ghanaian NGO worker at the camp who had experience of other camps in Ghana argued that the problems at Buduburam were partly a result of the location of the camp so close to Accra, and the population which includes many professionals. Referring to the camp in Western region, where there are reportedly excellent Ghana/Liberia relations, because the Liberians go out and earn a living as fishermen, farmers and masons, he suggested people at Buduburam are *'hiding their profession'* and expecting the UNHCR to look after them (Consultative Group meeting). However, this latter point was disputed by other NGO staff: one drew comparisons with his experience of Sierra Leone where Liberians were given jobs in the early 90s and soon integrated.

Negative views of camp refugees among Ghanaians are particularly focused on young Liberians. Ghanaians observe the strong Libero-American youth identity, perceived 'big dressing', violence and lack of respect for elders in Liberian youth culture: *'Liberian youth are very violent and feel free to speak their mind unlike Ghanaians'* (female Ghanaian NGO worker). We were told by another young Ghanaian NGO worker, *'Ghanaians give due respect to elders. Liberians talk freely about relationships and sex issues. A 16 year-old girl doesn't mind telling you; a Ghanaian girl would find it difficult... and Liberians are not too eager to go to school unlike the Ghanaians.... Though I haven't done research....they are not hardworking like Ghanaian youths... about a third are creative, most won't [work] even when you give them the money to start something, they prefer dressing big... maybe because of the American orientation, the easy life. ... Most have relatives outside [overseas]... they can use it [remittances] for fees, but it's for mobile phones and jeans... they can't pay the child's [school] fees but they come with a 3 million [cedi] mobile phone'*.

She was also keen to make the point that there were very positive elements in the community, a view supported by other non-Liberian NGO staff. One noted the way many Liberian women (especially single women) would look after Liberian children which were not their own: *'she will sacrifice for the child if she can't eat herself'*. They observed that when they interviewed these children separately to ensure exploitation was not occurring, all the children made it clear that they were happy with their foster mothers. In focus group discussions, Ghanaians who had had personal contact with Liberians also pointed to positive attributes of adaptability and enterprise, but the view that young Liberians are violent, arrogant and need to be educated on the courtesies and cultural values of the host population was raised in all six focus groups: "Old folks are sociable and amenable but the younger generally are recalcitrant" (Kasoa market focus group).

Many Ghanaians have limited awareness of the deep psychological traumas induced by war, the aftermath of war, refugee life and the difficulties of obtaining employment commensurate with that the refugees might have had in Liberia prior to the war. About one-quarter of youth on the camp are reportedly ex-combatants. Our Ghanaian collaborators who came to the camp with (at that stage unspoken) reservations based on negative local media reports soon observed and empathised with the enormous frustrations and difficulties that people there face: not least the long-term traumas of war.

Language, identity and livelihood

Language and identity issues are connected with access to livelihoods in direct and more complex ways. One of the most important distinctions between older people (especially older women) in the camp and most young people is the difference in their ability to speak Ghanaian languages. Whereas older women, in particular, often speak fluent Twi (the Akan language widely spoken across Ghana), which facilitates their trading activities, in particular, very few young people seem to have a good knowledge of Twi or other local Ghanaian languages which could enable them to interact with Ghanaians and might help them access jobs in the informal sector outside the camp. Indeed, many (possibly most) youth who have been in the camp for some years have hardly any knowledge of Twi. This may well have important implications for the quality of interaction with Ghanaians.

Some of the older 'youths' seem to recognise that this language problem prevents them making links to the Ghanaian community. Two such respondents observed that those attending Ghanaian schools integrate more easily because they learn Twi and the language barrier is thus overcome. However, some of the Ghanaian schools are reportedly expensive or difficult to access and there is no Twi language teaching in the camp, other than in the Senior Secondary School, which relatively few young people attend.

Even where language is not a barrier to understanding (since many Ghanaians speak English), Liberians are easily identified by Ghanaians when they speak English because of their distinctive accent: *'you go to a ministry and open your mouth as a Liberian... because a single Liberian committed a crime, the perception is... That's why Liberians don't go from here'* [i.e. don't leave the camp]. Some youths said Ghanaians would shout after them, because they heard them speak. Twi might offer a better language of communication from this perspective.

When we discussed the language issue with Ghanaians outside the camp who are involved in camp support it was suggested that *'Liberians don't easily learn other languages; even those here 10-14 years still don't speak Twi'* (NGO staff member). One of our research workers suggested that there seems to be more actual resistance among youth than among older Liberians to learning Twi and that this is one of the factors that confines young people to the camp, since it is difficult for them to communicate with outsiders.

The advantage of knowing Twi was acknowledged by a few young people. One 19-year old girl explained how her knowledge of Twi (gained in the Ivory Coast) had enabled her to make friends with a group of Ghanaians who help her with free fish and pepper when they meet her in the market. None of the other girls in the focus group in which we met her had any Ghanaian friends who helped them: none spoke more than a few words of Twi.

The psychological element in this apparent resistance to learning Twi has to be acknowledged. It may be a reflection of young refugees' determination to retain a Liberian identity (or at least to keep it until an alternative black-American identity can be achieved). Dick (2002b: 32) concluded that Liberians prefer Buduburam as an enclave, rather than integration in Ghana: we found this to hold most strongly among youth. Indeed, resistance to learning Twi among youth may reflect more the outcome

of their decision-making process, rather than a factor affecting their integration: a refusal to accept that they will be staying long in Ghana, and a recognition that they expect to be going on to the US (as so many wish to do) or returning home. In the US a knowledge of Twi will be of no value, as one young man pointed out. Another young man argued, however, that the language barrier was the biggest impediment stopping youths getting involved in local society and work, and felt that not only Twi and Ga languages, but also Ghanaian cultural mores should be taught in the camp schools.

By contrast with youth, older Liberian women, in particular, have not only learned to speak Twi, but also dress in Ghanaian style: this enables them to intermingle with Ghanaians far more easily and make friends with Ghanaians, to the extent that some said they actually now feel more Ghanaian than Liberian. They thus negotiate multiple national identities as a route to survival. Older men, by contrast with older women, have less contact with Ghanaians, presumably because they have not usually been involved in trading, but still seem to have more knowledge of Twi than youth.

Certainly, the extent to which young people identify with Liberian or Ghanaian nationality is partly related to particular good or bad encounters with local Ghanaians, as the following focus group exchange between young women shows. Even so, note the strong Liberian sentiments exhibited here, despite the presence of three Ghanaian researchers:

"I am Liberian – I don't have any Ghanaian friends."

"I feel both, because I have some Ghanaian friends in Tema."

"I feel both. My mother is Ghanaian and my father Liberian. I am attending a Ghanaian school in Kaso."

"I feel Liberian, because in Liberia I went through the struggle". [She goes on to recount an incident of being cheated by two Ghanaian market traders].

The accent issue, which is still being debated among refugees, was noted by earlier researchers (Dick 2002a). The solution so far as local trading is concerned seems to be to speak Twi, not English, but this seems to represent such a significant step towards becoming Ghanaian that it is resisted by the majority of youth who mostly pin their hopes on a future elsewhere, beyond Africa. The lure of the US for youth can not be overemphasised: *'nowadays, if they had money for nursery to PhD education in Ghana or go to the US, they'd go to the US... a boy told me, I prefer being in America on the dung pile than in Africa'* (teacher, Consultative Group April 2005)

'generally on the camp you feel connected to the USA, you have a friend or relative there,' (25-year old male student in focus group). The others in the group agreed: *"Most people plan to go to the USA", "USA is the land of opportunity first."*

If a new identity has to be constructed, it is clear that an American identity will be vastly preferable to most young Liberians (particularly young men) than a Ghanaian one. In focus groups generally all the young men expressed a desire to go to the US, rather than back to Liberia, whereas in girls' groups generally one or two preferred Liberia. Among older men and women, there was a stronger emphasis on returning to Liberia, but only in the [distant] future when conditions have fully stabilised and they have accumulated resources to take home. It was widely agreed among all age groups that at least 80% of camp inhabitants overseas contacts (through telephone, email and

the Red Cross) are with the US and Europe; at most only 20% are with Liberia: “calling Liberia gives us courage and call to USA/Europe gives us our meal” (focus group with young men).

Conclusion

Protracted refugee situations like that at Buduburam often raise particular difficulties for hosts, refugees and humanitarian donors. The cost and logistics of basic service provision are enormous and refugees commonly have to rely on developing their own livelihood opportunities in order to survive. However, this often complicates relations with host communities, exacerbating tensions. This is clearly exemplified by the situation at Buduburam. Most Liberian refugees here face major hurdles in building and maintaining a livelihood, not least because of the difficulties of relations between the camp and the host population in recent years. In Ghana, as in much of Africa, access to jobs is far more closely linked to social networks than to skills or qualifications (Chant and Jones 2005). Despite the enormous emphasis refugees in the camp gave to earning a livelihood, throughout our discussions of refugee well-being (expressed not just in terms of physical well-being but also in terms of self-respect and mental health and knock-on implications for social relations within the refugee community), many seemed unable or unwilling to build the social networks to the host population that might allow them to access regular employment. These problems are exacerbated by other factors, including the massive size of the camp population, the deep poverty of the Gomoa district where the camp is situated, and the urban character of most of the refugee population which means that the labour made available by the camp is incompatible with local (agricultural) labour needs. In some cases it seems that the frustrations associated with failure to access formal employment commensurate with their skills has encouraged a move into innovative but illegal livelihood strategies.

Within the refugee community distinctions in livelihood strategies and the extent to which these involve interaction with the host community are evident, varying in particular according to access to material resources, age, gender and length of time at the camp. Access to material resources is principally a function of access to overseas contacts and associated remittances. However, there is concern among both refugee and host populations regarding the extent to which remittances are used to build legitimate livelihoods and the extent to which they are simply squandered on conspicuous consumption, thus exacerbating antagonisms with the host community. Differences in host relations and associated livelihood impacts are also evident between refugee age groups. For older people in the camp, relations to the host population are often crucial to getting by: many older women, in particular, forge hybrid identities through their adoption of Ghanaian dress styles and ability to speak Twi. This enables those with adequate mental and physical strength to scrape together a living, usually through trade. By contrast our research suggests that many younger people in the camp, while equally desperate to find a livelihood, are unable to make the necessary social connections to the host population to obtain regular employment. On the face of it, this seems partially because they do not speak Twi, but underlying this may be unacknowledged reluctance to adopt a Ghanaian identity (principally through learning Twi) that would compromise their dreams, which focus on a new life in America. However, since 9/11 those dreams have become increasingly unrealisable, since US immigration restrictions have tightened substantially. Those who have arrived at the camp since 2000 face a particularly

difficult situation given the saturated local markets, dwindling generosity of local Ghanaians and lack of UNHCR support.

This paper has emphasised the strong linkages between social resilience, social networks and livelihoods. The complexities of resolving livelihood needs while maintaining good refugee-host relations are clearly enormous. Our research suggested that UNHCR will need to examine ways of improving relations with the Ghanaian host community, including examining the potential for a pilot programme of Twi classes in the camp. We found that Dick's assessment (2002b: 32) that many Liberians prefer Buduburam as an enclave, rather than integration in Ghana, applies particularly strongly to youth. Failure to understand Twi has arguably inhibited both their livelihood opportunities and general relations with Ghanaians. Although Twi language classes may be simply too late now to change lives at Buduburam, our findings suggest that local language tuition probably needs to be given much more serious consideration in future refugee contexts than has usually been the case. Finally, one recent strategy in refugee work has been to adopt a so-called developmental approach whereby needs of refugees and their host communities are dealt with together: the aim is that in this way conditions will move from relief to development. Although evidence from recent efforts at developmental approaches is not entirely positive³, in contexts like Buduburam, where the host population is very poor, this would seem a feasible strategy, but only if accompanied by substantial support for integration. A new initiative (supported by JICA) which appears to be offering skills training to both refugee and host communities, together with sensitisation campaigns in both regarding their mutual obligations⁴, appears a promising step in this direction.

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³ The application of a developmental 'Self-Reliance' strategy (SRS) to refugee management in northern Uganda, working through district development plans, has faced considerable obstacles in the face of the Ugandan government's wider political agenda (Kaiser 2005).

⁴ See <http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/2006/11/1110.html> last accessed 05/09/07

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Linkages between livelihood opportunities and refugee-host relations: learning from the experiences of Liberian camp-based refugees in Ghana

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