



briefing paper

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Bhutanese Refugees in Nepal: Anticipating the Impact of Resettlement

Susan Banki





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Cover image: *Refugees building a structure to be used for resettlement processing purposes, Beldangi camp, Dec 2007. Photo by the author.*

Table of Contents

Executive summary	vi
Introduction	1
Research Methods	2
Background: the context of resettlement	3
Flight from Bhutan	3
No return possible	3
Difficult camp life	3
The Lhotshampa refugee population today	4
Social background	4
Refugee residence and movement	4
Citizenship status	5
Camp atmosphere	6
Conflicting opinions	6
Anti-resettlement activity	6
Fear and insecurity	6
Lack of information	8
Confusion and anxiety	9
Uninformed migration choices	10
Glimmers of hope	10
Likely resettlement profile	11
Education	11
Experience	11
Gender and Age	13
Caveats	13
Impact of resettlement on camp residents	14
Goods and services	14
Informal income	15
The security environment	17
Impact on political mobilisation	18
Impact on local community	19
Synthesis	20
Policy recommendations	22
Acronyms	24
Endnotes	25

Executive summary

When refugees resettle to new countries, populations left behind are affected. These include remaining camp residents, political leaders and local residents. This report presents a preliminary forecast of the impacts to remaining populations of the mass resettlement of Bhutanese refugees currently residing in Nepal. In summary, the forecast is mixed for the remaining population, with some aspects of life expected to improve while other elements may worsen.

As resettlement moves forward, **morale has wavered between hopeful and tense**. There have been violent and even fatal clashes between refugees who oppose resettlement and those who support it. This has resulted in **a highly charged camp atmosphere in which hope, resentment, and anxiety have all played significant roles**. A lack of information about the resettlement process is compounded by the reluctance of many refugees to show an interest in resettlement for fear of being attacked.

As large numbers of refugees depart from the camps, **common resources** (such as firewood) **will be more readily available and camp facilities less overcrowded**. At the same time, the likely **depletion of educated, skilled and experienced workers** could **reduce the quality of camp services**, particularly in the health and education sectors.

Overseas remittances will likely increase as refugees resettle to richer countries. However, **informal income from regional or local work may decrease** as educated and skilled refugees resettle early.

Spates of violent attacks associated with the advent of resettlement in and near the refugee camps represent a clear **deterioration of the security environment**. In response, the Government of Nepal has brought in a larger

police presence, which may **reduce overall crime** but could simultaneously lead to a **more restrictive environment** in which refugees cannot travel outside of the camps.

Bhutanese political leaders fear that resettlement will **dilute the efforts of refugees who continue to promote political reform in Bhutan**, as their cause loses its urgency and its constituents. Conversely, resettlement may lead to an **injection of resources and media attention for political leaders**.

For local residents living near the camps in Nepal, the departure of large numbers of refugees will **decrease competition for local resources and employment**. In the long-term, however, resettlement will lead to **a contraction of the local economy** and **a reduction in the pool of available human capital**.

The social, economic and political impacts of resettlement have the potential to improve conditions for remaining populations and/or exacerbate current problems. This report concludes with policy and program responses designed to reinforce the positive aspects of resettlement while mitigating the negative consequences.

Introduction

In 1990, tens of thousands of Lhotshampas – Nepali-speaking minority groups from Bhutan’s southern regions – fled from Bhutan in the face of discrimination and forced displacement. After crossing through India, they sought refuge in Nepal. Today, more than 107,000 Lhotshampas live in 7 refugee camps in Nepal’s eastern Jhapa and Morang districts, where they have remained in legal limbo, claimed as citizens by neither Bhutan nor Nepal.¹

After 18 years, a lasting solution to the plight of Lhotshampa refugees is now available. In March 2008, over 100 Lhotshampa refugees boarded planes to the U.S., one of several countries that have agreed to resettle this refugee population. Other countries to offer resettlement to the Lhotshampas include New Zealand, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway and Australia.² There is no limit on the number of camp residents who can be resettled, and now that the Government of Nepal (GoN) has begun issuing exit visas for those accepted for resettlement, it is estimated that the process of resettling all who are accepted for resettlement will take between five and seven years.³ As of May 2008, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Nepal has already received nearly 30,000 expressions of interest in resettlement, representing nearly one-third of the entire refugee population.

The anticipation and excitement felt by some refugees is not shared by all, however. Some refugees are ambivalent about moving so far away permanently. Others oppose resettlement in principle, arguing that resettlement weakens the claims of those who want to return to Bhutan. The passion surrounding the issue of resettlement has resulted in threats of violence and even physical clashes between refugees inside and outside the camps, resulting in several injuries and the death of at least one camp resident.

The departure of large numbers of refugees over a relatively short period of time will significantly alter the camp population and structure. As with any significant change, this one will have both positive and negative impacts on the remaining refugees – those who don’t want to resettle, those who cannot resettle and those who haven’t yet resettled – and surrounding communities. **As the resettlement program gets under way, there is a need to anticipate some of these changes, so that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and policymakers can craft policies that reinforce the positive aspects of resettlement while developing policies and programs to address the negative consequences.**

This report presents a preliminary forecast of the impacts of resettlement on those who remain.⁴ It draws on research conducted as the first resettlement interviews were being conducted, but before any refugees were actually resettled. **It outlines the primary groups likely to be affected and lays out the possible consequences – positive and negative – of resettlement on these groups.** The report concludes with recommendations aimed to ensure that the resettlement process moves as smoothly as possible, and that, in its wake, there are systems in place to respond to the needs of concerned parties.

Research methods

Field research for this report was conducted during November and December of 2007, primarily in Kathmandu, Damak and three of the seven refugee camps: Beldangi I, Beldangi II and Beldangi Extension. The report provides an overview of the salient issues associated with resettlement, but does not address the specificity of each camp.

Interviews were conducted with:

- officials from UNHCR and other UN agencies, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the Government of Nepal (GoN);
- representatives from the U.S. State Department and the Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC);
- national and local staff from Lutheran World Federation-Nepal (LWF-Nepal), United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), Association of Medical Doctors of Asia-Nepal (AMDA-Nepal) and Caritas;
- journalists, filmmakers and independent researchers;
- local Nepalese businessmen and residents who live near the camps;
- refugees from the Camp Management Committees (CMCs) and camp-based community-based organisations (CBOs); and
- camp residents from various political, social and cultural groups, including refugees who are both supportive of and opposed to resettlement.

Given the sensitivity around the issue of resettlement, several precautions were taken to ensure objectivity. A local Nepalese student was employed as an interpreter, rather than a refugee, to reduce the likelihood that refugees would be reluctant to be interviewed. The research team used local transportation to travel to the three camps, rather than travelling in agency vehicles, to demonstrate its independence.

Refugees were assured of anonymity in all interviews, and a password-protected document was used to record all refugee information.

Quotations from refugee interviews have been attributed anonymously in this report, unless refugees gave their explicit permission otherwise. Several other stakeholders also requested anonymity.

Background: the context of resettlement

Flight from Bhutan, the lack of alternative possibilities for long-term solutions and deteriorating camp conditions have all set the stage for mass resettlement of the Lhotshampa refugee population.⁵

Flight from Bhutan

Bhutan's southern Nepal-speaking population began leaving Bhutan in early 1990, in the wake of increasingly rigid citizenship laws and cultural/linguistic policies that favoured the ruling Dzongkha class at the expense of the Lhotshampa population.⁶ Protests by Lhotshampas during that time were followed by a swift crackdown by Bhutanese police, and soon after tens of thousands of Lhotshampas crossed the border into India and then continued on to Nepal. By September 1995, there were nearly 90,000 Lhotshampas in Nepal.⁷ This fleeing population, and their children since born in eastern Nepal over the past 18 years, constitute the 107,000 Lhotshampa refugees currently registered in the camps in eastern Nepal.⁸

No return possible

Several attempts to resolve the Lhotshampa refugee issue have floundered. Bilateral talks between Nepal and Bhutan intended to facilitate the return of some refugees to Bhutan resulted in claims by the Government of Bhutan (GoB) in June 2003 that only 2.4% of one camp's population were 'genuine' citizens of Bhutan. Even this small number was not permitted to return, however. Camp residents were so incensed at how few Lhotshampas were determined to be 'genuine' that they attacked Bhutanese government officials who came to visit the camp, stalling any further discussion of repatriation.⁹ **Not a single refugee has been permitted to return.**

Difficult camp life

Local integration in Nepal for over 100,000 refugees is currently not a possibility; while ethnic, linguistic and religious similarities with host communities in Nepal have permitted a *de facto* tolerance of some refugee movement and the possibility of low-paying daily labour, **Lhotshampa refugees are generally confined to camps and unable to pursue secure livelihoods.** Thus, the large majority remain dependent on international humanitarian aid. WFP provides food and runs income-generating activities in the camps, while UNHCR ensures that fuel and housing materials are provided to the refugee population.

Over time, however, international donors have grown increasingly reluctant to continue funding a refugee situation with no end in sight, and, in light of Bhutan's refusal to accept any Lhotshampas back into the country, programs initially designed to prepare refugees for repatriation have been scaled back. **Agencies' budgetary constraints have led to cuts in food, fuel, housing materials and clothing, exacerbating difficulties for the population.**¹⁰

Even refugees with poor English skills know the words 'languishing' and 'warehoused' and use these terms frequently to describe their situation in the camps.¹¹ A calamitous fire in early March 2008 in Goldhap camp served as a stark reminder of the refugees' vulnerability when, over the course of several hours, the fire destroyed 95 percent of the camp's structures and left most of the camps 9,770 residents homeless.¹²

The Lhotshampa refugee population today

A preliminary examination of the Lhotshampas' social background, residence and movement, and citizenship status provides a current context to inform the key issues that are surfacing as resettlement moves forward.

Social background

Lhotshampas are a relatively well-educated refugee population. Prior to flight, their education in Bhutan was generally of a higher level than that of their local hosts in Nepal. About 13% of registered refugees have an education past 10th grade¹³ and about 35% of camp residents can conduct their daily life in English.¹⁴

UNHCR data record refugees' occupations, which reflect either their employment as it was in Bhutan or as it is presently in Nepal. Nearly 13% of Lhotshampas reported working in agricultural jobs while another 13% reported being homemakers or housekeepers. These occupations, combined with more than 40% of the population reporting as students, comprise the vast majority of Lhotshampas. Other occupations include: tailors, educators, social

workers, construction workers, engineers, artists and civil employees.

Refugee residence and movement

By 1995, UNHCR had registered the entire Lhotshampa refugee population in the camps, since which time the population has remained relatively stable. Unlike other refugee situations, in which a continual stream of refugees from the source country can confound UNHCR's rolls, the registration of Lhotshampa refugees has been relatively straightforward because there have been few new arrivals (with the exception of births) in the camps. The 2007 process of issuing identification cards to each refugee confirmed the stability of the Lhotshampa population.

Refugees do, however, leave the camps, both during the day and for longer periods.¹⁵

- Every morning, refugees ride their bicycles out of the camps to participate in informal daily (but irregular) wage labour. The availability of daily labour, and hence the number of workers exiting the camps daily, depends upon the season and the local



Refugees returning from daily labour, Beldangi camp, Dec 2007. Photo by the author.

economy, but it is estimated that thousands of refugees work daily in nearby fields or construction sites, where they earn between 50 and 120 rupees per day (\$.77 to \$1.85 USD).

- An estimated 1,000 refugees travel to India seasonally, to take jobs or study in schools there.
- It is estimated that hundreds of refugees live in Kathmandu, where, with a good education, they work in higher-paying jobs.
- Some refugee students attend local schools far enough away from the camp that they do not return each night, but instead, stay in nearby towns.
- Thousands of educated English speakers work in boarding schools throughout Nepal, where they provide a helpful boon to Nepal's English-speaking teacher force.
- More than 100 refugee families are registered with the GoN who live officially outside of the camps, most of whom are political leaders.¹⁶

Nepal's qualified tolerance to its refugee population in permitting such movement compares favourably to other refugee situations where camps are more restrictive. Nevertheless, refugees report being exploited by local bosses because of their precarious status.¹⁷ In addition,

refugees' freedom of movement is contingent on the GoN, which can, and has, blocked exit from and entry to the camps at a moment's notice, most recently during the April 2008 elections, when officials were concerned that refugees might try to cast proxy votes in the name of other voters.¹⁸

Citizenship status

In theory, any refugees obtaining citizenship in Nepal should no longer be registered in the camps. But some registered refugees have tried to gain citizenship status through false documents. Others have managed to secure Nepali citizenship by obtaining 'real documents the wrong way.'¹⁹ And still others have gained citizenship through intermarriage.

Refugees with 'secret' citizenship are obviously reluctant to discuss their status, so it is difficult to estimate the numbers of those who have it. But several interviewees surmised that those with some form of citizenship may be less eager to resettle because they have put down roots in Nepal.²⁰ It may also be that such refugees plan to resettle only parts of their families, viewing resettlement as another form of labour migration. (See section entitled 'Uninformed migration choices,' p. 10.)

A Piece of History: Remembering the Berlin Wall

Refugees lose not only their physical territory when they flee, but often, their claim to individual histories, which become subsumed by un-nuanced humanitarian narratives that simplify and objectify their pre-flight experiences. But refugees have rich and detailed individual histories, ones that demonstrate that, prior to flight, they were often in positions of power, wealth and prestige. Thus it should come as no surprise that among the Lhotshampa refugee population are those with experiences that defy stereotypes of refugees as victims. One former camp secretary used to play basketball with the King of Bhutan. Another served on the King's Royal Advisory Council. A third participated in a Bhutanese government delegation in Germany in 1989. When he fled Bhutan less than a year later, he brought with him a piece of the Berlin Wall, which he keeps to this day in his refugee camp hut.

Camp Atmosphere

Since the resettlement offer first emerged in 2006, **refugees' conflicting opinions about resettlement have resulted in a highly charged camp atmosphere in which hope, resentment, and anxiety have all played significant roles.**

Conflicting opinions

At stake for those who oppose resettlement is the loss of their political movement, the loss of their community and the loss of the dream of returning to Bhutan. 'We have worked for so many years to make repatriation a reality,' lamented one refugee. 'With resettlement, I fear that we will give it all up.'²¹

Implicit in this view is the opinion that the option of resettlement is disastrous, not only for those who espouse it, but for everyone, because declining numbers of refugees in the camps lessen the urgency of promoting repatriation. Thus **'anti-resettlement' refugees have discouraged resettlement in a number of ways, from publishing statements to issuing threats to engaging in actual violence against 'pro-resettlement' refugees.** (See next section entitled 'Anti-resettlement activity'.)

For their part, **pro-resettlement refugees want to be able to promote, discuss and apply for resettlement openly.** Some insist that anti-resettlement refugees only care about losing power while others accuse anti-resettlement factions of being self-serving. 'They have land, money, maybe even citizenship here in Nepal,' asserts one refugee. 'For them, it is no problem to stay and they want the rest of us to stay too.'²²

A more sympathetic view of anti-resettlement groups may instead label them 'pro-repatriation' as their aim is to **shift the focus of the international refugee regime away from resettlement and toward repatriation.** 'Repatriation was the entirety of their political career,' notes one journalist. 'If the refugees go, their constituency is gone.'²³

Anti-resettlement activity

Several stakeholders, including UNHCR officials, NGO employees and other agencies estimate that there are no more than about a hundred people actively opposed to resettlement. Whether this number is accurate is difficult to ascertain, but it is certain that the **anti-resettlement presence has made itself known in powerful ways.**

First, **camp elections in 2007 shifted the power dynamics in the camps.** Prior to these elections, most refugees elected to the Camp Management Committee (CMC) were pro-resettlement or neutral. In 2007, however, a new round of camp elections ushered in an almost entirely pro-repatriation/anti-resettlement slate of CMC officers. There were allegations that pro-resettlement candidates were intimidated into not standing for election, but these could not be substantiated.²⁴ Since the CMC is one of the most effective channels to deliver information to camp residents, a lack of cooperation on the CMC's part could impede the distribution of resettlement information.

Second, several stakeholders claim that **anti-resettlement leaders have influenced young refugees who are susceptible to manipulation.** The then-Country Director of UNHCR's Nepal office noted that 'youth are being persuaded by elders to act violently.... They encourage this rebellious attitude.'²⁵ This oft-repeated argument, however, is undermined by new research that contends that Lhotshampa refugee youth are not being manipulated by others, but are, instead, educated, competent and rational actors who have embraced political groups advocating violence at the same time that they promote human rights and children's rights in the camps.²⁶ This argument indicates that anti-resettlement youth may have given careful thought to the possibility of resettlement, and may continue to reject it categorically even after

exposure to UNHCR pamphlets and information sessions.²⁷ It may also indicate that there are more than 100 anti-resettlement activists, because **youth may be taking the initiative to pursue anti-resettlement activities, rather than only following the orders of leaders.**

Third, **pro-resettlement refugees (i.e., those who have welcomed visiting delegations and/or personally expressed an interest in resettling) have been threatened.** ‘There are lots of handwritten notes,’ asserts one refugee. ‘I have found a note in my hut that says, “We will end your life if you choose to resettle.” They are genuinely playing an emotional game with people that have nothing.’²⁸ An article in the *Himalayan News Service* reported that in November 2007, sixty-two refugees appealed to the police for protection after receiving death threats. The article reported that the anti-resettlement groups ‘told the refugees that they will be forgiven and allowed to remain in peace if they recant from their pro-(re)settlement stance.’²⁹

Fourth, **pro-resettlement refugees have been subject to attacks on several occasions.** These attacks underscore the depth of the resentment that resettlement has wrought:

- In May 2007, the pro-resettlement secretary of Beldangi II was attacked for espousing resettlement openly. In the ensuing clash, in which Nepal’s Armed Police Force (APF) protected the secretary, one refugee was killed.³⁰
- In December 2007, one individual interested in resettlement was shot in the town of Damak, indicating that violence associated with resettlement is not confined to the camps themselves. The group that claimed responsibility for the attack claimed that its actions were specifically geared to ‘foil’ resettlement.³¹
- In early May 2008, nine masked men attacked an IOM bus that was carrying refugees being processed for resettlement, an incident that ‘shocked’ UNHCR. The bus was substantially vandalised and the driver and some of the refugees inside were injured.³²

Fear and insecurity

The threat of and actual violence surrounding the resettlement issue have further inflamed and divided the refugee community and created an undercurrent of fear in the refugee camps. ‘We are scared even to express interest in resettlement. There is no privacy in the camps and even if we run to (the) UNHCR office in town to ask questions, people can talk about us. . . . People want information but they are afraid to ask.’³³

The tension between pro- and anti-resettlement factions is made worse by the fact that each side claims that the other manipulates the truth to achieve its aims.

- Anti-resettlement groups allege that refugees who want to resettle actually manufacture threats to demonstrate false vulnerability as a way of expediting their own resettlement claims. ‘They will pay a radical boy 12 thousand rupees (nearly \$200 USD) to dismantle their hut, just so that the victim will be resettled first,’ explained one refugee leader.³⁴
- Pro-resettlement refugees accuse anti-resettlement groups of manufacturing evidence to try to prevent resettlement. Knowing that most resettlement countries will likely not resettle anyone who has been involved in violent activity, anti-resettlement groups can easily jeopardise an applicant’s chances for resettlement by suggesting affiliation with insurgent groups. Such evidence can easily come in the form of a receipt for a contribution to one of several communist or Maoist groups. Over the past several years, thousands of Lhotshampa refugees have donated to these organisations, either willingly or through fear or coercion.³⁵

Violence and the fear of violence have polarised the camps somewhat, but it is important to remember that **the majority of camp residents do not fall neatly into the pro- or anti-resettlement factions.** Many families want to decide their futures together, and have, until the present, not made up their minds. **The next few years will be very difficult for these refugees as they navigate the needs of family, the opinions of friends and pressures from anti-resettlement groups.**

Mislabelling Maoists

Stakeholders and refugees themselves commonly fail to differentiate between Maoists, their Bhutanese counterparts from the Bhutan Communist Party (BCP), anti-resettlement activists, and other political groups interested in promoting change in Bhutan. Differentiating between these groups is important, however, in order to develop effective policies that respond to their discrete goals and needs.

The **Maoists** have waged a long insurgency against Nepal's monarchy, and in April 2008, won the most seats of all parties in Nepal's democratic elections. Several reports have suggested that the Maoists are responsible for the strength of the BCP in the camps, through recruitment and training.³⁶

The **BCP** has called for democratic reform in Bhutan, including the repatriation of 'all its citizens' through armed struggle.³⁷ Its members are also publicly anti-resettlement. In May 2007, the BCP prevented UNHCR from meeting with camp residents about resettlement and took responsibility for the 13 December shooting of a pro-resettlement refugee.³⁸

Groups opposed to resettlement engage in actions and use language that may be either stridently anti-resettlement or temperately pro-repatriation. Anti-resettlement activities may be associated with the BCP, but not necessarily. Pro-repatriation groups also include the Bhutanese Refugees Representatives' Repatriation Committee (BRRRC), which has organised petitions, rallies and hunger strikes to call attention to the issue of repatriation.

Numerous **political groups** are working to promote change in Bhutan. Some want to end the monarchy while others are pushing for democratic reforms that will improve the treatment of minorities. Some espouse violence while others promote only peaceful means of protest.

It is important to recognise that while the activities of these groups may overlap, the groups themselves are not inter-changeable. Many refugees who are not Maoists or BCP members have participated in protests against the GoB, not all anti-resettlement activists are Maoists or members of the BCP, and not all political groups advocating change in Bhutan are anti-resettlement.

Lack of information

Despite concerted efforts by UNHCR to conduct information campaigns for all camp residents beginning in November 2007, including the distribution of UNHCR information pamphlets in local languages and in English, **refugees lack information about many aspects of the resettlement process.**

Threats and violence have also meant that some refugees fear asking questions about resettlement in a public forum. There are even indications

that some individuals publicly opposed to resettlement have, in private, requested it, indicating how unwilling people truly are to express their interest in resettlement openly.³⁹ Under such circumstances, where **refugees feel uncomfortable both expressing interest in resettlement and asking questions to alleviate their concerns**, it is not surprising that rumours have thrived. (See box entitled 'Resettlement Rumours,' p. 9.)

While some blame anti-resettlement groups for the circulation of such rumours, it is certainly

the case that many rumours are based on misunderstandings. For example, males over 18 resettling to the U.S. (from any country) are required to sign a declaration that they are willing to be drafted into the U.S. military. This has led to rumours that refugee youth are forced to join the U.S. army upon arrival.⁴⁰ ‘There is a grain of truth in almost every rumour,’ notes David Derthick, IOM Resettlement Officer for Nepal. ‘That’s why it’s so difficult to undo them.’⁴¹

Confusion and anxiety

There is also confusion surrounding the process of applying and interviewing for resettlement. Depending on the resettlement country, refugees may be asked to meet with different personnel (UNHCR, resettlement country representatives and IOM staff) as many as five times. The process, from first interview to flight departure, is expected to take six months on average, if no extenuating circumstances present themselves. But some refugees confuse an expression of interest (made by letter or in

person at UNHCR) with an interview, and the wait thereafter feeds their anxiety.

Further, situations of polygamous marriage, separated children and extended families complicate the resettlement process.⁴² While such complications do not necessarily stop resettlement, but only slow it, refugees who are impatient to leave, or fear remaining in the camps after they have expressed their wish to resettle, have discussed **feelings of nervousness and fear because resettlement doesn’t occur immediately.**⁴³

Because the resettlement process is just beginning, refugees’ fears of being left behind have not yet materialised. Over time, however, refugees may be rejected for a variety of reasons: medical problems, participation in insurgent forces, or other particularities having to do with resettlement country policies. It can be anticipated that rejected refugees (or those who do not resettle because family members have chosen not to) will undergo stress and depression, as has been documented in other refugee camps

Resettlement Rumours

- Refugees are being ‘sold’ to resettlement countries for slave labour
- Resettlement countries will not take applicants who are old and infirm
- Refugees will be forced to fight in Iraq for the U.S. military
- A button on the airplane will eject refugees when the airplane flies over the ocean
- Pro-resettlement individuals received money from UNHCR to say positive things about foreign countries
- India promotes resettlement because it wants to send the refugees far away
- After several years, resettlement countries will force refugees to move once again, to another country

where populations are left behind.⁴⁴ Because several resettlement countries are committed to taking large numbers of Lhotshampa refugees, the phenomenon will likely not be as widespread, as, for example, in Dadaab camp in Kenya, where the percentages of refugees who are actually accepted for resettlement are miniscule. Nevertheless, **refugee depression and anxiety, already a cause of concern in the camps, may increase significantly** in such situations.

Uninformed migration choices

Anxiety also stems from ambivalence about what resettlement exactly means. UNHCR's resettlement pamphlet explains that 'Persons accepting and departing Nepal on resettlement will no longer be considered as refugees in Nepal, and will not automatically regain refugee status if they return to Nepal. They will be legal permanent residents and eventually if they choose, citizens of the country they are resettled [*sic*].'⁴⁵ But for the Lhotshampas, who had their citizenship status taken away in Bhutan, the statement in UNHCR's pamphlet may not imply a permanent solution.

Several discussions with refugees revealed that some households are considering breaking families apart to send the young for education and/or jobs.⁴⁶ These possible choices indicate that **some refugees view resettlement as another form of labour migration**, in which working-age family members are expected to go abroad for the express purpose of making money to send back remittances to the rest of the family. While it is indeed hoped that remittances will form an important part of the future remaining-refugee economy (see section entitled 'Informal income,' p. 15-16), resettlement strategies that view resettlement as a form of periodic migration are likely to be problematic.

Glimmers of hope

Although few refugees will discuss the matter publicly, **resettlement has raised the hopes of many refugees**. Some ask questions that reveal an eagerness to begin a new life outside the confines of a refugee camp, expressing excitement and apprehension in the same breath. 'The UN told me that life will be easy in a new country. But what will happen to me if I can't get a job?' asked one.⁴⁷

Similarly, some parents (particularly the educated) who have watched their children lose out on educational and economic opportunities are focused on ensuring a better future for their children.⁴⁸ And local news sources have reported that refugees who intend to resettle are more positive and hopeful than they have been for years.⁴⁹

While these impacts on morale are indeed positive, it is important to note that they offer hope to those resettling, rather than to the remaining population.

Likely resettlement profile

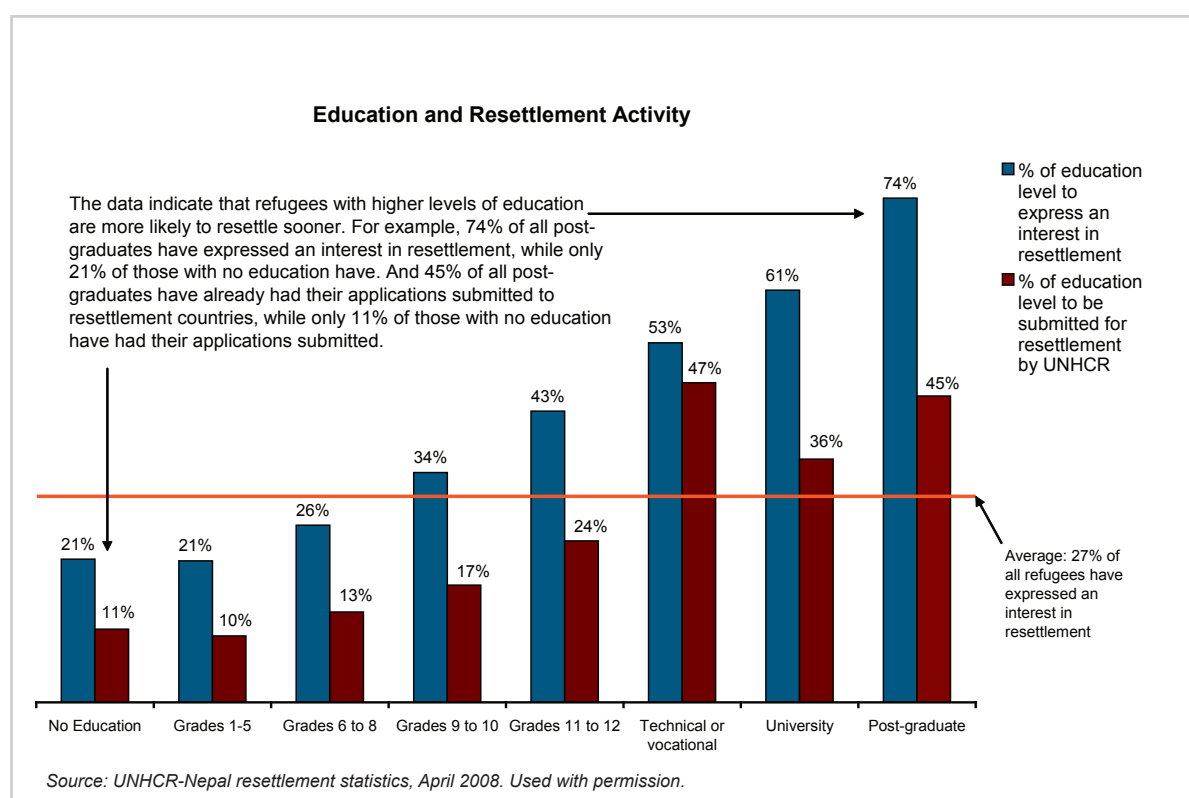
Painting a tentative profile of those who will resettle and those who will remain is useful in anticipating how resettlement is likely to affect remaining populations. Similarly, determining which refugees will resettle sooner rather than later is important because of how such population changes will alter the character of the camps in the 5+ interim period while resettlement is ongoing. Early data analysis reveals that **a higher proportion of educated and skilled refugees will be among the first to resettle, and elderly populations and other vulnerable populations will not be left behind.**

Education

Data provided by UNHCR reveals the **tendency of the best educated to be more interested in**

resettlement. As of April 2008, more than 74% of refugees with a post-graduate education have expressed an interest in resettlement, compared to 27% of all camp residents. As a similar study of the resettlement of refugees from Burma out of Thailand found,

the educated *want to* resettle in higher percentages than the total camp population (emphasis added). They are less intimidated by the outside world, and they believe that because of their jobs in the camps and/or their English abilities, they will be able to secure better jobs in third countries. The members of this group also have more access to information about resettlement within the camp community simply because of their daily contact with the outside world.⁵⁰



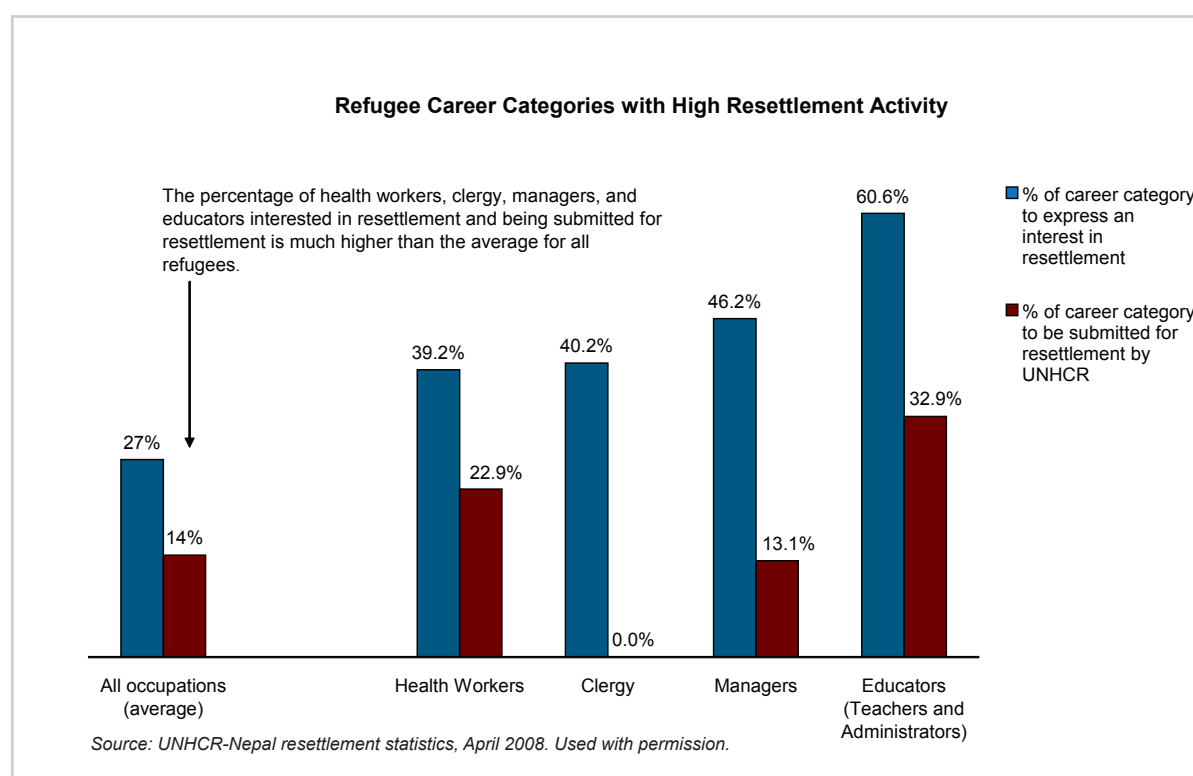
UNHCR screens all refugee expressions of interest and then submits them to resettlement countries. It is currently working through the backlog of all refugees who have expressed an interest and, as of April 2008, has submitted to resettlement countries about 50% of those who have expressed an interest. The data show that UNHCR is not showing preference toward one particular education level over another. (See chart entitled 'Education and Resettlement Activity,' p. 11).

It is too early to analyse whether some resettlement countries will be involved in 'cherry-picking' – i.e., accepting for resettlement only the most highly skilled and best educated of all applicants. The U.S., which is accepting by far the largest number of Lhotshampas, is well-known for inclusive refugee policies and does not selectively filter by education or skill level. Total numbers accepted, however, is not an indication of whether or not a camp will be

drained of its best educated and most highly skilled workers. For example, less than 1%, or about 900 people from the Lhotshampa camps, have a post-university education level. But if one country – even one that only resettles small numbers of refugees compared to the U.S. – accepted 450 post-university graduates, it would halve the best educated population in one year. UNHCR is alert to the dangers of cherry-picking and tries to juggle the expectations of both resettlement countries and refugees, but it cannot entirely prevent resettlement countries from selecting refugees based on their 'local integration potential.'

Experience

Humanitarian agencies are not only worried about losing their best educated workers, but those with the most experience. **There are four types of occupations for which applicants**



have a significantly higher rate of interest and submission than the total camp population: health workers, clergy, managers and educators. It seems likely that these individuals will resettle early in far greater proportions than the total population, possibly affecting the three main sectors of camp life: health, camp administration and education. (See chart entitled ‘Refugee Career Categories with High Resettlement Activity,’ p. 12.)

Gender and age

UNHCR’s data also show resettlement activity by gender and age. Thus far, **males and females and refugees across different age groups have expressed an interest in resettlement and been submitted in similar percentages**; the data show no specific trends. (See ‘Resettlement Interest by Age and Gender,’ below).

This data supports the prediction of one staff member from IOM, who noted that Lhotshampa families are tightly-knit units and will likely resettle three or four generations at one time. Grandparents and great-grandparents will be among those to be resettled, so that they won’t be left without care in the camps. ‘Resettling such elderly refugees is a new challenge for resettlement agencies. In Africa, there were so few elderly refugees at all.’⁵¹

An extrapolation from this early data and associated predictions may negate aforementioned concerns about large numbers of refugees breaking up their families in pursuit of economic livelihood decisions (See section entitled ‘Uninformed migration choices,’ p. 10.)

Caveats

While these data illuminate some of the possible challenges that the remaining population will face, **there are two important caveats to bear in mind**. First, because of the aforementioned tension in the camps at present, expressions of interest in resettlement today cannot accurately reflect what is to come in the following months and years. **Many refugees may be taking a ‘wait-and-see’ approach and will only express their interest after the first wave of refugees has resettled and sent reports (and remittances) back to the camps. This second-wave phenomenon may well shift current trends.**

Second, **there are variations in terms of education level and resettlement interest among the seven camps. In addition, there is variation within each camp.** Some sectors are more likely to be interested in resettlement, while others eschew it. Intuitively, such variation makes sense, because refugees who live close to one another may be more likely to attend the same meetings and be exposed to the same kinds of visitors, be they anti-resettlement activists or resettlement officials. Thus, it is important to recognise that certain areas of each camp can easily be neglected. Despite the fact that camps are relatively small places and the populations therein are limited in their movement, even after 18 years, it is estimated that only 30% of the camp population has ever visited a camp office to make requests, communicate needs or make complaints,⁵² indicating that certain camp populations can easily be marginalised or isolated.

Resettlement Interest by Age and Gender								
Ages 0-18			Ages 18-59			Ages 60+		
M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total
23%	23%	23%	29%	30%	29%	28%	28%	28%
Average: 27% of all refugees expressed an interest in resettlement								

Source: UNHCR-Nepal resettlement statistics, April 2008. Used with permission

Impact of resettlement on camp residents

There are three primary areas on which resettlement may have positive or negative impacts for remaining camp residents: goods and services; the increase or decrease in informal income; and the security environment. This research reveals that resettlement has the potential to improve or pose additional challenges in all three areas.

Goods and services

Humanitarian agencies working in the camps are concerned with how resettlement will change the provision of goods and services therein. One positive impact is that **as more people resettle, physical camp facilities such as housing, medical clinics or libraries will be less overcrowded and there will be a lower overall demand for common goods** (although food and fuel rations will be adjusted according to changes in the population). For example, several refugees have noted that it will be less burdensome to share public items, such as solar-powered cookers, when there are fewer people in the camps.⁵³

The looming negative impact of resettlement on camp services concerns **the depletion of highly educated and skilled refugees who form the main core of camp service staff**. This ‘brain drain’ is a likely possibility given the analysis of UNHCR data that shows that these individuals are more likely to want to resettle first (See section entitled ‘Likely resettlement profile,’ p. 11-13.)

In Thailand, where refugees from Burma are resettling in proportions as high as those anticipated from Nepal, resettlement has presented a significant challenge for service providers. Many health workers, teachers and administrators have departed, leaving humanitarian agencies in the difficult position

of trying to provide quality care with far fewer experienced and skilled workers.⁵⁴

Humanitarian agencies in Nepal have similar concerns, but there are several reasons why the depletion of skilled and experienced workers will likely be less worrisome in the Lhotshampa camps than in Thailand.

- UNHCR, partially learning from its mistakes in Thailand, has streamlined the resettlement process in Nepal so that resettlement is occurring more quickly. While this gives humanitarian agencies less time to train new recruits, the overall population is resettling faster, so that fewer workers will be required.
- Because Lhotshampas speak the same language as their hosts, it is easier for humanitarian agencies to work with local staff to fill positions in the camps, rather than recruiting from overseas.
- There is a deep pool of recruits from which humanitarian agencies can draw once camp-based staff start to resettle, because ‘there has been education turnover and re-training for years.’⁵⁵ One agency employee estimates that about 15% of the currently unemployed camp population speaks English, making it easy to recruit and retrain replacements as the current working population departs.⁵⁶

While Nepal may fare well compared to Thailand, **national staff from the education and health sectors in Nepal recognise the possibility of brain drain**.

The health sector relies on Nepalese doctors employed by AMDA for specialised care and trainings, and the experience of these doctors can help to fill gaps that occur when refugee

health workers begin to resettle. But **preventive medicine and midwifery, both roles commonly performed by the refugees themselves, have the potential to decrease in quality if large numbers resettle.** One AMDA physician noted that to avoid gaps in service, new trainings need to be implemented as soon as possible, not after most of the health workers have left.⁵⁷

Resettlement may pose serious challenges to the education sector. More than 60% of those who listed ‘education’ as a profession have expressed an interest in resettlement compared with 27% of the total population. Further, because of the sensitivity surrounding the resettlement issue, camp educators are not comfortable discussing their future resettlement plans. It is therefore difficult to predict which of the current 950 schoolteachers and 250 administrators will remain in the camps in the intermediate and long-term, and if some camps will be more adversely affected than others.

According to one educator, the best strategy to address the loss of education staff will be to continue the model of training that Caritas (the NGO that runs the education programs in the camps) has implemented for years: apprentice training where new teachers learn from more experienced ones in the classroom.⁵⁸

Informal income

Although humanitarian agencies provide food, fuel and housing materials to the refugee population, many families supplement these rations with additional income, often used to purchase fresh vegetables, additional housing materials, clothing and school supplies for children. Because much of this income is earned without the explicit permission of the GoN, it is difficult to estimate who brings it in, or how much. **Without informal income, refugee quality of life would suffer. Likewise, an increase in such income would likely improve the standard of living of its recipients.**

There are several factors that could influence the rise or fall of informal income:

First, some **refugee income comes from incentive stipends** given to camp-based workers, ranging from 728 to 1540 rupees (\$11.21 to \$23.73 USD) per month. As a whole, this income **will remain constant**, or decrease proportionally as fewer workers are required to perform camp jobs.

Second, **daily wage labour** brings a significant amount into the camps, which varies according to wages, the number of days one is able to find work and the percentage of the population working each day. Daily wage labour **will remain constant** if male adults who engage in such labour resettle in similar proportions as the rest of the population, as the current data indicate that they will. (See section entitled ‘Gender and age,’ p. 13.)

For a small number of daily labourers, however, resettlement has **improved their wages in the short-term.** The process of resettling tens of thousands of refugees each year has increased the demand for construction workers in the camps and even in Damak, near the Beldangi camps. Most of the construction workers building the IOM complex are refugees themselves. Many are now planning to resettle. ‘If we have to work so hard labour, we may as well be in the U.S.,’ one refugee construction worker reasoned.⁵⁹

Third, there is income from **refugees who work in the region**, but further afield – such as in boarding schools throughout Nepal, high-skilled jobs in Kathmandu and various types of jobs in India. Such income is **likely to decrease** for three main reasons:

- Refugees in high-skilled jobs in Kathmandu who choose to resettle will not be easily replaced by new refugee workers. One well-placed refugee estimated that 50% of all refugees living in Kathmandu are interested in resettling as quickly as possible.⁶⁰

- It is surmised that boarding school teachers will be among the first to resettle, because their English is excellent and so is their exposure to the outside world. These are positions that will be harder for other camp refugees to fill in the future.
- Refugees who travel seasonally to India and other parts of Nepal have already curtailed their travelling because they want to make sure that they are in the camps when UNHCR and resettlement countries conduct their interviews.⁶¹ Even families that are not sure if they want to resettle have called back members of the family working in India in order to discuss the resettlement situation.

Fourth, income is generated between and among refugee households by **loans through the Bhutanese Refugee Women's Forum (BRWF)**. If resettling households default on their loans, the remainder of the community will be forced to shoulder the burden.

Fifth, there are thousands of women in the camps who earn small amounts of money

through **income generation projects** such as weaving and sewing. These projects are likely to continue to bring in income, with **little change** as resettlement continues.

Finally, **remittances from abroad** represent the greatest potential for **injecting the camps with additional income**. Even if nuclear families resettle as a whole, it is likely that resettled refugees will continue to send money back for extended family and cultural events. Because resettlement has just started, there is no data to quantify what might be termed 'resettlement remittances,' but they are likely to share three characteristics:

- Remittances will probably not arrive immediately since refugees will be occupied with integration and education in the first months of resettlement.
- Resettlement remittances will almost certainly be significantly higher in value than regional remittances that have come thus far.
- Resettlement remittances will likely arrive with less frequency than regional remittances.

Supplemental income in the camps:

- Incentive stipends
- Daily wage labour
- Income from regional work
- Micro-loans offered through BRWF
- Income generation projects
- 'Resettlement remittances'

The complexity of these factors indicates that to fully quantify the income changes associated with resettlement, more research would be required. But most of these factors point to the fact that **informal income in the camps will depend on household resettlement patterns**. If the elderly remain in Nepal in higher proportions than the rest of the population, then income flowing into the camps will decrease per capita. Likewise, if working-age males remain in the camps in higher proportions, the total income to the camps will be higher. **Using the categories above, agencies can begin to flag households for whom resettlement will represent a loss of income.**

The security environment

Spates of violent attacks associated with the advent of resettlement in and near the refugee camps represent a clear deterioration of the security environment.

Some stakeholders, however, observe a silver lining: the introduction of the Armed Police Force (APF), a professionalised and well-trained force whose previous mission was to fight Maoist guerrillas. The APF was hired to man new police posts that were built in all of the camps to improve security in anticipation of resettlement.

One view holds that the **APF is better trained and more professional than the previous police force that worked in the camps**, and anecdotal evidence in the Beldangi camps suggests that **non-political acts of violence (i.e., general crime) in camps may have decreased since APF's introduction**.⁶² This is partially because during the height of Nepal's Maoist insurgency, there was virtually no police presence of any kind in the camps, and when the civilian police force was present, it did little to enhance the security environment in and near the camps.

Individuals associated with anti-resettlement disagree with this assessment, however. They report that **the APF has harassed, intimidated and detained some of their members, often**

without cause. 'They have *carte blanche* to do whatever they want,' complained one refugee. 'They just harass anyone in a radical group or anyone alleged to be in one.'⁶³ Following the tension in recent months, the APF arrested five refugees associated with the anti-resettlement movement in February 2008, allegedly for destroying the hut of another camp resident.⁶⁴

Security is a double-edged sword for refugees who want to move freely throughout Nepal. The GoN has shown relative tolerance to refugee movement around the camp area and even in other regions of the country. But **the violence associated with the anti-resettlement movement has led to sporadic restrictions, such as temporary curfews and prohibitions on leaving the camps**.⁶⁵

While restrictions on refugee movement have been kept to a minimum thus far, recent events could change the security environment. If violence associated with resettlement continues to increase in the camps, the GoN may crack down harder on the refugee population, perhaps by limiting movement between camps. Conversely, the new government, not inclined to look favourably upon the APF, whose previous mission was to fight Maoist guerrillas, could recall APF soldiers from their posts in the camps, which could either minimise movement restrictions or breed further tension and violence.

Impact on political mobilisation

One of the primary arguments in the anti-resettlement arsenal is that **resettlement will dilute the efforts of refugees who continue to promote political reform in Bhutan** and who struggled for years to reclaim their citizenship. Despite the fact that UNHCR's handbook insists that resettlement is 'not intended to prevent you from repatriating to your home country,'⁶⁶ resettlement does represent both a physical and emotional dislocation from Bhutan. Further, in the absence of refugee camps, activists fear that all international attention focused on Bhutan will fade, and the dream of returning home will become ever more distant.

Tek Nath Rizal, a former political prisoner in Bhutan and one of the few public faces of anti-resettlement, notes that **the dilution of the movement will affect not only those who cannot return to Bhutan, but those who remain there today**. There are between 60,000 and 120,000 Lhotshampas still living in Bhutan, including political prisoners, those living under continued discrimination and those whose properties have been confiscated. 'Promoting resettlement stops concerns for this population,' Rizal warns.⁶⁷

A thorough May 2007 Human Rights Watch (HRW) report confirms Rizal's assertions about the difficulties facing the internal Lhotshampa population. The report found that **Lhotshampas in Bhutan live with the persistent fear of having their citizenship and rights to education, civil employment, and movement taken away**.⁶⁸

While some have countered that **resettlement will lead to new opportunities for advocacy and lobbying**, injecting the movement with additional resources and media attention, the direct impact on the activities of democracy activists in Nepal has already been felt. This is partially because those who demonstrate vocally for democracy in Bhutan have been – justly or not – associated with those who oppose resettlement, and some **members of pro-democracy groups have been detained or kept under close watch**.

In addition, **funding for democracy groups has dried up**. One group, the Human Rights Organization of Bhutan (HUROB), which tactfully straddles the resettlement debate, has been active for years in the camps. In 2006, however, as resettlement approached, HUROB lost its funding. 'It's hard to pay for our office and even for our telephone,' says its acting chairman, S.B. Subba.⁶⁹

The chief complaint of democracy activists about the resettlement process is that UNHCR is perceived to be working only toward resettlement. One anti-resettlement refugee explained that 'the conflict in the camps is not a result of resettlement itself. It's because all of UNHCR's time is spent on resettlement, and none on repatriation. That's where the conflict comes from.'⁷⁰

UNHCR and donor countries insist that they are focusing on resettlement now as a sequencing strategy. That is, **by relieving some of the pressure in the camps through resettlement, they hope to effectively lobby for repatriation thereafter**.⁷¹ But there is a sense among some that Bhutan was moving toward repatriation in 2003. The attacks on Bhutanese officials were perceived as a momentary setback, rather than the end of the debate. Repatriation, some believe, would have surfaced again as a possibility, and resettlement has stopped that process in its tracks.⁷²

Finally, a number of refugees, including those who are eager to resettle, admit that recently, **pro-democracy groups have been discouraged from engaging in political activities**.⁷³ **This development, combined with the current focus on resettlement, further reinforces the fears of those who are concerned that repatriation is fading as a possibility**. On the flip side, while UNHCR may restrict refugees' political activities in Nepal (as it does in many host countries), political mobilisation and organising are generally permitted in resettlement countries.

It is too early to predict how resettlement will

eventually alter the shape of Lhotshampa political mobilisation, and far too early to foresee whether such mobilisation will compel the GoB to allow the safe return of Lhotshampas to Bhutan. For the time being, however, **acknowledging the**

legitimate concerns of anti-resettlement/pro-repatriation refugees and tacitly supporting their continued struggle for political reform in Bhutan might relieve some anti-resettlement sentiment.

Impact on local community

Refugee influxes can have both adverse and beneficial effects on host communities. **Refugees may compete with locals for employment, natural resources, and services.**⁷⁴ They may also generate new resources in the form of international assistance, economic assets, and human capital.⁷⁵ In Nepal, local opinions of the refugee population range between a begrudging admission that refugees boost the local economy⁷⁶ to resentment at the depletion of local firewood, which, in February 2007, manifested itself in a clash in which one refugee was killed.⁷⁷

Just as refugees' presence shapes local conditions, so too does their sudden departure. This is particularly so because mass resettlement occurs over a relatively short period of time and causes a spike, and then a steep drop, in the resources entering the local economies near the camps. **In Nepal, it is anticipated that these impacts will be both positive and negative.**

The spike has already started. **The resettlement process, requiring infrastructure for hundreds of expatriate staff to live, work, and communicate, has suddenly increased the demand for high- and low-skilled labour, accommodation and material supplies,** particularly in Damak, the town closest to the Beldangi camps and the local headquarters of UNHCR and IOM.

While a mass influx of foreigners and business means that some locals have experienced an increase in their wages, it is also the case that **local prices and rents have increased.** One long-serving staff member of a humanitarian NGO serving in the camps had to move out of his apartment when his landlord raised the rent to accommodate an expatriate staff member involved in the resettlement process.⁷⁸

As the resettlement process continues, the need for expatriate staff will eventually decrease. At the same time, there will be **fewer refugees participating in the local economy.** When that occurs, **humanitarian agencies would do well to heed the complaints and needs of local populations, who have already expressed resentment that they are not considered for resettlement.** 'They shared their firewood and schools with refugees for more than a decade, while refugees received free food,' commented a local journalist. 'Now they sit back and watch as everybody goes to the U.S. It's not perceived as fair.'⁷⁹

The local community has also benefitted until now from hundreds of well-educated English speakers who have taught English at local schools throughout Nepal and especially near the camps. **The likely resettlement of most of these teachers will represent an incalculable loss to local schools and to their students who have been studying English for years.**

Finally, it is general humanitarian practice that as refugees depart, their huts are dismantled and extra supplies returned to the agencies that provided them. 'It's no good to let (local people) keep the tents, because then they want everything the refugees have – food, services, and resettlement,' admitted one staff member of a national NGO.⁸⁰

Denying local residents supplies and services that they never had to begin with will not worsen their lives, but in a context where resettlement has already created resentment, efforts to **work with local communities and transfer remaining resources to the local population** would likely be welcomed by local residents and government officials.

Synthesis

There are myriad advantages for those who want to resettle and who are accepted to resettlement countries, chief among them the opportunity to begin a new life outside the confines of a refugee camp.

For camp residents, political leaders and local residents who remain, resettlement presents both opportunities and challenges.

The potential positive impacts of resettlement include: more space and resources available for the remaining camp population; an increase in overseas remittances; a decrease in general crime due to the introduction of a trained police force; greater overseas support for political groups; and reduced tension between host communities and refugee populations over local resources and employment.

The potential negative impacts of resettlement include: confusion and anxiety associated with resettlement decisions; the depletion of camp-based workers, leading to a lower quality of camp services; a reduction in income from regional earnings; continuing resettlement-related violence among refugee camp residents; restrictions on refugee movement outside of the camps; a weakening of political groups' claims to citizenship in Bhutan; and a long-term contraction of the local economy.

(See table entitled 'The Potential Impact of Resettlement: Positives, Negatives, and Policy Responses,' p. 21.)

The Potential Impact of Resettlement: Positives, Negatives, and Policy Responses

Impact on...	Potential positives	Potential negatives	Possible policy responses
Morale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hope for those resettling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tension and fear due to conflicting opinions about resettlement • Confusion about resettlement process • Anxiety and depression for those who are delayed or rejected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribute resettlement information widely • Heed signs of deteriorating mental health among camp residents
Camp goods and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in overcrowding • Common resources more widely available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depletion of educated, skilled and experienced camp-based workers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement replacement trainings and apprenticeships as soon as possible
Informal income	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in remittances from overseas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in income from local / regional work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop systems that facilitate overseas remittances • Be sensitive to sectoral / household variance in income reduction
Security environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decrease in general crime in camps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resettlement-related threats and violence • Restrictions on refugee movement outside of the camps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor the security environment in and surrounding the camps • Promote government policies permitting refugee integration and movement
Political mobilisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in overseas donations to political groups • Improved access to media in resettlement countries • Permission to protest publicly in resettlement country 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dilution of urgency of activists' aims • Prohibition on protest activities in Nepal • Previously available resources channelled to resettlement initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to place pressure on the Government of Bhutan to allow safe and secure repatriation • Monitor the situation of those Lhotshampas who remain in Bhutan
Local community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced competition for local resources and employment • Short-term boost to local economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in local prices and rents • Long-term contraction of local economy • Loss of English teachers • No opportunity to acquire resettling refugees' abandoned possessions • Resentment directed toward resettling refugees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transfer extra resources to local population • Initiate programs that incorporate host communities' needs

Policy recommendations

As of March 2008, the first group of Lhotshampa refugees resettled from Nepal. The process is expected to continue, sporadic anti-resettlement attacks notwithstanding. The following policy recommendations are intended to help stakeholders craft policies that reinforce the positive aspects of resettlement while developing policies and programs to address the negative consequences.⁸¹

UNHCR and Resettlement Countries

Continue to improve the process of distributing information about resettlement, while also keeping in mind the need for privacy and confidentiality.

- **Share information about the timing of the resettlement process** as openly as possible, so that refugees prepare mentally and emotionally and humanitarian agencies can accurately anticipate their own organisation's needs.
- Consider creative ways to **distribute resettlement information** that will supplement the information channels of the Camp Management Committee, such as movies, notes distributed with rations or random sector visits.

Follow the resettlement country selection process and **advocate for selection criteria that does not result in 'cherry picking.'**

Monitor the security environment in and surrounding the camps, including the actions of Nepal's Armed Police Force.

Promote government policies that **continue to tolerate freedom of movement and enable refugees to pursue livelihoods outside of the camps.**

Humanitarian Agencies

Respond to potential 'brain drain' by implementing program responses as soon as possible.

- **Begin replacement trainings** early to ensure the smooth turnover of camp-based jobs.
- **Train apprentice workers** where possible.
- Communicate as openly as possible with camp staff to **anticipate staff decreases.**

Given the possibility of depression, anxiety and confusion associated with resettlement, **pay special attention to refugees' mental health**, which should be a key component of health care services.

Be sensitive to sectoral and household differences within camps, as decreases in services, rations or income may affect some parts of the population, or some families, more than others.

Develop systems that **encourage the easy flow of remittances** back into the camps, such as developing relationships with local banks, experimenting with internet transfers, etc.

Minimise impact of resettlement on local community.

- Consider implementing programs that **incorporate host communities' needs**, such as allowing local residents to participate in training programs.
- As refugees resettle, **consider an initiative to 'green' abandoned areas of the camp**, encouraging refugees to plant gardens before they resettle and handing them over to local residents when refugees depart.

All parties

Given recent elections in both Nepal and Bhutan, **closely monitor the political situation for signs of renewed violence** from refugee groups or others.

De-escalate tension among the refugees by reaching out to all refugee stakeholders, including anti-resettlement leaders.

Continue to place pressure on the Government of Bhutan to **allow the safe and secure repatriation of Lhotshampa refugees, while monitoring the situation of those Lhotshampas who remain in Bhutan.**

Acronyms

AMDA	Association of Medical Doctors of Asia
APF	Armed Police Force
BCP	Bhutan Communist Party
BRWF	Bhutanese Refugee Women’s Forum
CBO	Community-based organisation
CMC	Camp Management Committees
CWG	Core Working Group on Bhutanese Refugees in Nepal
DIAC	Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship
GoB	Government of Bhutan
GoN	Government of Nepal
HUROB	Human Rights Organization of Bhutan
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IOM	International Organization for Migration
LWF-Nepal	Lutheran World Federation-Nepal
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
UNHCR	Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees
WFP	UN World Food Programme

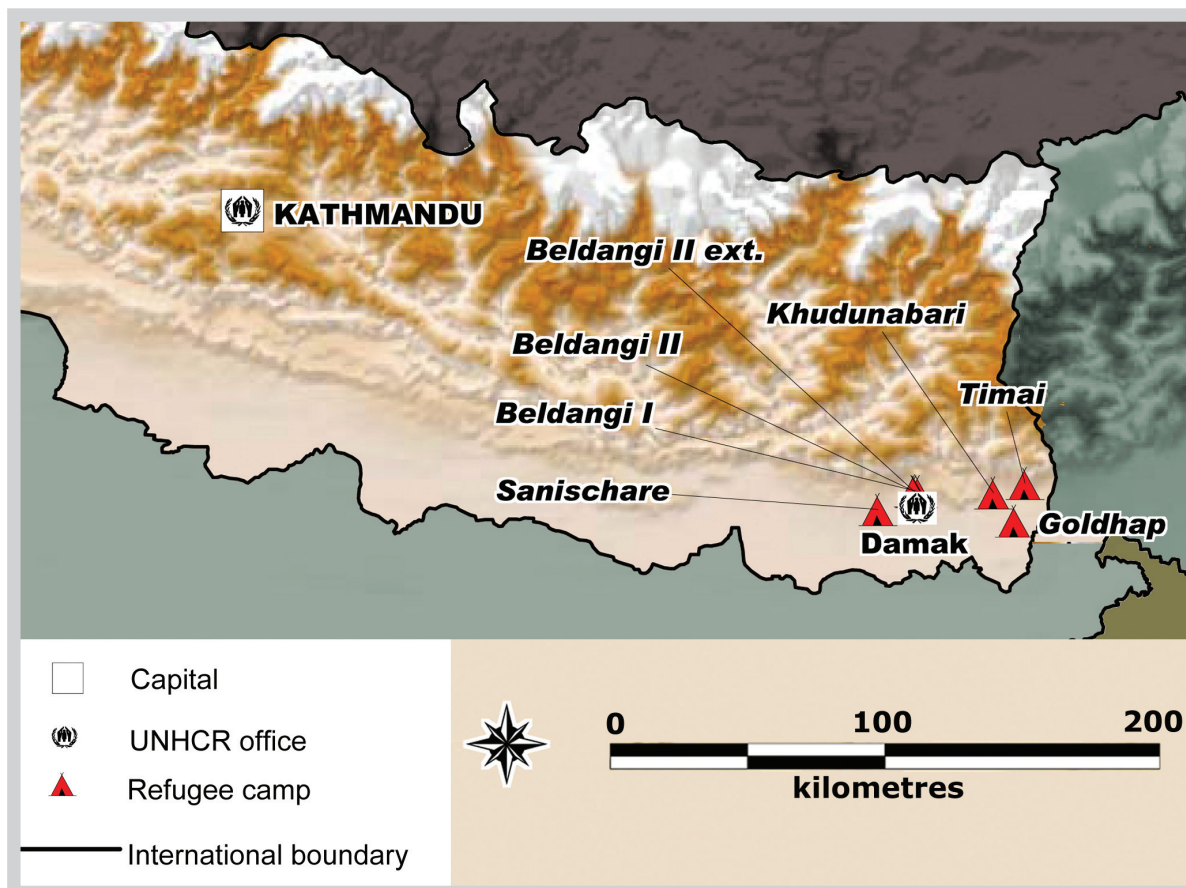
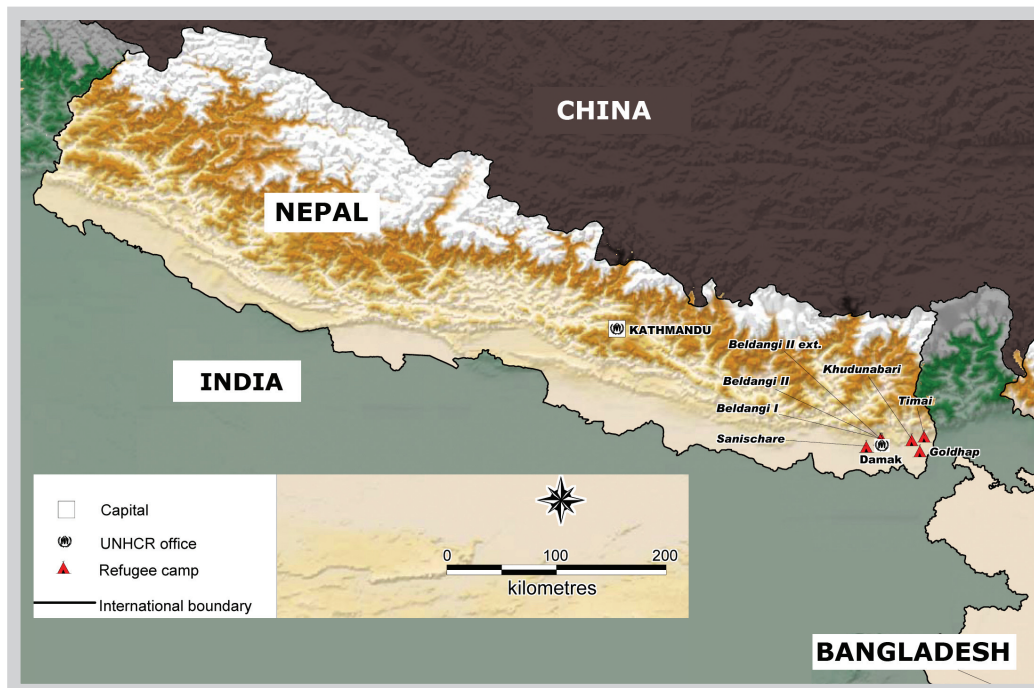
Endnotes

- 1 The term ‘Lhotshampa’ translates directly as ‘people of the south,’ a label that describes the refugee population from Bhutan rather imperfectly, because today the word is also used in Bhutan to describe all ethnic groups who live in southern Bhutan. Yet other terms used to describe the refugee population such as ‘ethnic Nepalis’ or ‘Nepali-speaking southerners’ are equally unsatisfactory because they ignore the fact that not all refugees from Bhutan are ethnically or linguistically Nepalese. In this report, the term Lhotshampa is used to describe refugees from Bhutan who come from a variety of ethnic minority groups in Bhutan, most of whom are Nepali-speaking. The term Lhotshampa was chosen because it differentiates the refugee population from other Bhutanese and also from other refugee populations in Nepal, such as Tibetans.
- 2 Australia will begin resettling Lhotshampas in late 2008 or 2009 through its Humanitarian Programme. The first two groups are likely to be resettled in Adelaide and Tasmania. The Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) has already prepared a Community Profile for Bhutan to inform government officials, service providers and other resettlement stakeholders about the specific circumstances of the Lhotshampa population. At present, Australia’s Bhutanese population is miniscule. According to the 2001 census, only 63 Australian residents were born in Bhutan. In the past 10 years, DIAC’s resettlement database has identified only 7 individuals from Bhutan as humanitarian entrants. See Commonwealth of Australia, ‘Bhutanese Community Profile,’ (Canberra: Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2007).
- 3 While the recent election in Nepal has ushered in a Maoist ruling party that has traditionally rejected resettlement, the new government has not, at time of this writing, slowed the resettlement process.
- 4 There is a significant body of policy and academic work devoted to better understanding how refugees integrate and assimilate once they resettle. There is less information, however, on the populations who remain behind. This report seeks to address that gap.
- 5 For a detailed examination of the political factors that additionally contributed to the resettlement process, see Susan Banki, ‘The Durable Solution Discourse and Refugee Resettlement: The Bhutanese in Nepal,’ in *No Place to Call Home: Protracted Displacement in Asia*, ed. Howard Adelman (London: Ashgate, 2008, forthcoming).
- 6 Daniel Schäppi, ‘Cultural Plurality, National Identity and Consensus in Bhutan,’ (Zurich: Center for Comparative and International Studies, 2005).
- 7 Michael Hutt, ‘Ethnic Nationalism, Refugees and Bhutan,’ *Journal of Refugee Studies* 9, No. 4 (1996).
- 8 This history of Lhotshampa flight is contested by the Government of Bhutan (GoB), which claims that: 1) many of those in the camps were never citizens to begin with; 2) government policies were not meant to be exclusionary, but only to maintain the character of the country; and 3) Lhotshampas are not refugees because they willingly gave up their citizenship when they left the country. Yet Lhotshampas in the camps have held onto old passports, land receipts and other documentation to assert that their property and land were taken away unjustly and by force. For the most current and comprehensive account of Lhotshampa emigration and flight, see Michael Hutt, *Unbecoming Citizens: Culture, Nationhood, and the Flight of Refugees from Bhutan* (Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
- 9 Rakesh Chhetri, ‘Betrayal of Hope and Dignity,’ *Kathmandu Post*, 26 July 2003; and P. G. Rajamohan, ‘Terror and Refuge,’ *South Asia Intelligence Review* 3, No. 19 (2004).
- 10 As detailed in a 2007 Human Rights Watch (HRW) report, agencies have made concerted efforts to plug the gaps created by cuts in essential services, such as distributing coal briquettes in place of fuel and organizing a clothing drive. Nevertheless, HRW reports that refugees’ quality of life has suffered, particularly in the areas of education, physical health, and mental health. Human Rights Watch, ‘Last Hope: The Need for Durable Solutions for Bhutanese Refugees in Nepal and India,’ (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2007), p. 19 – 23.
- 11 Direct observation, UNHCR resettlement information session, Beldangi II, Nepal, November 2007.
- 12 ‘More Funds Needed to Aid Bhutanese Refugees after Fire Destroys Camp,’ *UN News Service*, 8 March 2008.
- 13 Unless otherwise noted, all statistical data about the Lhotshampas presented in this report come from UNHCR’s resettlement data, April 2008. Many thanks are due to Parveen Mann at UNHCR-Damak for compiling and sharing this information.
- 14 Internal UNHCR document distributed to the Core Working Group on Bhutanese Refugees in Nepal (CWG), p. 3. Used with permission.

- 15 Figures for informal movement and activity are difficult to estimate. The numbers offered in these bullet points come from interviews with various agency staff (UNHCR, LWF and Caritas) and were corroborated by a local journalist (DN40) and a civilian camp official (DN23), Damak and Beldangi camps, Nepal, November and December 2007.
- 16 Internal UNHCR document, p. 2.
- 17 Interviews, international NGO staff (KN2), Kathmandu, Nepal, November 2007; refugees (DN25, DD46), Beldangi camps, Nepal, November and December 2007.
- 18 'Bhutan Refugees to Be Restricted in Camps,' *The Rising Nepal*, 5 April 2008.
- 19 Interview, Gopal Gartaula, vice-president, Federation of Nepalese Journalists, Damak, Nepal, November 2007.
- 20 Interviews (KN10, DN20, DD47), Kathmandu and Damak, Nepal, November and December 2007.
- 21 Interview, refugee (DN16), Damak, Nepal, November 2007.
- 22 Interview, refugee (KN9), Nepal, November 2007.
- 23 Interview, local journalist (KN7), Kathmandu, Nepal, November 2007.
- 24 Interview (DD47), Damak, Nepal, December 2007.
- 25 Interview, Abraham Abraham, UNHCR Country Director, Kathmandu, Nepal, November 2007.
- 26 Roz Evans, 'The Two Faces of Empowerment in Conflict,' *Research in Comparative and International Education* 3, No. 1 (2008).
- 27 On the other hand, the 'second wave' phenomenon, discussed further on, may have the opposite effect, increasing interest in resettlement over time.
- 28 Interview, refugee (KN9), Nepal, November 2007.
- 29 'Refugees Get Death Threats,' *Himalayan News Service*, 12 November 2007.
- 30 'Another Refugee Dies in Police Firing; Curfew in Beldangi; UNHCR Urges Restraint,' *Nepalnews.com*, 28 May 2007.
- 31 'Bhutan Party Admits Shooting of Refugee,' *The Rising Nepal*, 22 December 2007.
- 32 'UNHCR, IOM Condemn Attack on Refugees,' *Nepalnews.com*, 6 May 2008.
- 33 Interview, refugee (DN34), Damak, Nepal, November 2007.
- 34 Interview, refugee (DD55), Damak, Nepal, December 2007.
- 35 One particularly problematic provision for resettlement lies within the USA Patriot Act, which stipulates that individuals who provide any type of 'material support' to armed groups are ineligible for asylum. Waivers to the material support provision have been granted to refugees from other countries and they may be granted in Nepal, but even if they are, they slow the resettlement process and may be misapplied.
- 36 See, for example, Aruni John, 'Potential for Militancy among Bhutanese Refugee Youth,' (Colombo: Regional Center for Strategic Studies, 2000); and South Asia Analysis Group, 'Bhutan: Refugee Issue- Stalemate Continues- Update No.55,' (SAAG, 2006).
- 37 S. Chandrasekharan, 'Bhutan: Distribution of Maoist Document in Refugee Camps: Should Be Cause for Concern. Update 30,' (SAAG, 2003).
- 38 'Bhutan Party Admits Shooting of Refugee,' *The Rising Nepal*, 22 December 2007; and 'Opportunity or Threat: The US Resettlement Offer for the Bhutanese Refugees,' in *ACHR Weekly Review* (Asian Centre for Human Rights, 2008).
- 39 Interview, individual involved in resettlement process (KN4), Kathmandu, Nepal, November 2007.
- 40 Chetan Adhikari, 'IOM Starts Refugee Interviews: Youths Resent 'Joining' US Army,' *Kathmandu Post*, 2 December 2007.
- 41 Interview, IOM, Damak, Nepal, December 2007.
- 42 Most resettlement countries resettle households according to the nuclear family structure, so husbands with more than one wife may feel compelled to choose only one. Children who are separated from their parents are supposed to show documentation that their parents approve their decision to resettle. Families with large extended families may face obstacles in resettling their families as one unit and in one region.
- 43 UNHCR is aware that privacy is a scarce resource in refugee camps. Attending a resettlement information session, standing outside UNHCR's offices in Damak, or receiving a personal visit from a resettlement officer in the camps are all likely to make others believe that one is applying for resettlement. UNHCR has attempted to ensure privacy in the resettlement process by posting identification numbers, rather than names, to inform refugees when they have interviews. Such efforts notwithstanding, many refugees still fear that other camp residents spy on them when they look at resettlement bulletin boards or discuss plans with family. Many refugees keep their resettlement decisions a guarded secret, even from close friends.
- 44 Cindy Horst, 'Buufis Amongst Somalis in Dadaab: The Transnational and Historical Logics Behind Resettlement Dreams,' *Journal of Refugee Studies* 19, No. 2 (2006).
- 45 UNHCR, 'Third Country Refugee Resettlement Information: Refugees from Bhutan Living in Nepal,' (Jhapa, Nepal: UNHCR, 2007).
- 46 Interviews, refugees (KN10, DN30a, DD45b), Kathmandu and Beldangi camps, Nepal, November and December 2007.

- 47 Interview, refugee (DD45a), Beldangi Extension, Nepal, December 2007.
- 48 Direct observation, UNHCR resettlement information session, Beldangi II, Nepal, November 2007; and BRWF meeting, Beldangi Extension, Nepal, December 2007.
- 49 'Thousands of Bhutanese Refugees Ready to Resettle in Third Countries,' *IRIN News*, 5 February 2008.
- 50 Susan Banki and Hazel Lang, 'Planning for the Future: The Impact of Resettlement on the Remaining Camp Population,' (Bangkok: Committee for Coordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand (CCSDPT), 2007), p. 5.
- 51 Interview, resettlement officer, IOM, Damak, Nepal, December 2007.
- 52 Interview, Ramesh Karki, Associate Protection Officer / former Field Assistant, UNHCR, Damak, Nepal, December 2007.
- 53 Interviews, refugees (DN22, DN28, DN35), Beldangi camps, Nepal, November 2007.
- 54 For a full account of resettlement's impact on service delivery, see Susan Banki and Hazel Lang, 'Difficult to Remain: The Impact of Mass Resettlement,' *Forced Migration Review* 30 (2008); and Banki and Lang, 'Planning for the Future: The Impact of Resettlement on the Remaining Camp Population.'
- 55 Interview, Kimberly Roberson, Officer for Durable Solutions, UNHCR, Kathmandu, Nepal, November 2007.
- 56 Interview, Marceline Rozario, country representative, LWF-Nepal, Kathmandu, Nepal, November 2007.
- 57 Interview, Dal Bahadur Gurum, physician in charge of voluntary staff, Primary Health Care Center, Beldangi II, November 2007.
- 58 Interview, educator (DN33), Damak, Nepal, November 2007.
- 59 Interview, refugee (DN19b), Damak, Nepal, November 2007.
- 60 Interview, refugee (KN1), Kathmandu, Nepal, November 2007.
- 61 Interview, refugee family (DN30a, DN30b, DN30c), Beldangi II, Nepal, November 2007.
- 62 Interviews, UN officials and NGO staff (KN2, BN15, DN17, DN29), Kathmandu, Biratnagar and Damak, Nepal, November and December 2007. Interview, refugee (KN16), Damak, Nepal, November 2007.
- 63 Interview, refugee (DN41), Damak, Nepal, November 2007.
- 64 'Anti-US Resettlement Refugees Arrested,' *The Rising Nepal*, 18 February 2008.
- 65 'Bhutanese Refugees Virtually Imprisoned in Camps,' *Himalayan Times*, 2 August 2006.
- 66 UNHCR, 'Third Country Refugee Resettlement Information: Refugees from Bhutan Living in Nepal,' Kathmandu, (Kathmandu: UNHCR, 2007).
- 67 Interview, Kathmandu, Nepal, November 2007.
- 68 Human Rights Watch, 'Last Hope: The Need for Durable Solutions for Bhutanese Refugees in Nepal and India,' section 5. Because it is virtually impossible to conduct research inside of Bhutan, HRW interviewed Bhutanese who were studying in India.
- 69 Interview, Damak, Nepal, December 2007.
- 70 Interview, refugee (DD44), Beldangi Extension, Nepal, December 2007.
- 71 Interviews, members of the Core Working Group on Bhutanese Refugees in Nepal (DD50, DD51) Kathmandu, Nepal, November and December 2007.
- 72 Interviews, refugees (KN1, KN12a, KN12b, DD44), Kathmandu, Damak, and Beldangi camps, Nepal, November and December 2007.
- 73 Interviews, refugees (KN9, DN19a, DN39, DN41), Kathmandu, Damak, Beldangi camps, Nepal, November 2007.
- 74 See, for example, Robert Chambers, 'Hidden Losers? The Impact of Rural Refugees and Refugee Programs on Poorer Hosts,' *International Migration Review* 20, No. 2 (1986).
- 75 Karen Jacobsen, 'Can Refugees Benefit the State? Refugee Resources and African Statebuilding,' *Journal of Modern African Studies* 40 (2002).
- 76 Interview, local shopkeeper (DN26), Damak, Nepal, November 2007.
- 77 US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, *Bhutanese Refugee Killed in Clash with Locals* (USCRI, 2007 [accessed 13 May 2008]); available from <http://www.refugees.org/article.aspx?id=1564&rid=1179&subm=33&ssm=87&area=Investigate&>.
- 78 Interview, local staff (DN21a), Damak, Nepal, November 2007.
- 79 Interview, local journalist (KN7), Kathmandu, Nepal, November 2007.
- 80 Interview, international staff member, NGO (DD53b), Kathmandu, Nepal, December 2007.
- 81 Other reports have offered detailed recommendations to address the problems associated with resettlement. For example, Banki and Lang, 'Difficult to Remain: The Impact of Mass Resettlement' and Banki and Lang, 'Planning for the Future: The Impact of Resettlement on the Remaining Camp Population.'

Map of Nepal



Source: UNHCR

When refugees resettle to new countries, populations left behind are affected. These include remaining camp residents, political leaders and local residents. Based on field interviews in Nepal, this briefing paper presents a preliminary forecast of the impacts to remaining populations of the mass resettlement of Bhutanese refugees currently residing in Nepal.



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Bhutanese Refugees in Nepal: Anticipating the Impact of Resettlement June 2008

Susan Banki