

SURVEY OF THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF AFGHAN REFUGEES IN PAKISTAN

Hanne Christensen
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UNRISD

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OF AFGHAN REFUGEES IN PAKISTAN**

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PREFACE

The social situation of refugees has constituted an important part of UNRISD's research programme in the eighties. Work has been carried out on refugees in Tanzania, Somalia and Mexico but the biggest effort has been devoted to studying the socio-economic situation of Afghan refugees who constitute the largest concentration of refugees in any one country in the world. Previous work has comprised two small-scale surveys of food and related aspects in Baluchistan and the North West Frontier Province in Pakistan.

The present monograph presents the findings of a large-scale survey on the skills, employment and income patterns, social relations, occupational aspirations and related aspects of the Afghan refugees in Pakistan. The survey covered nearly 3,000 households in 58 villages through a stratified two-stage random sample. The information was obtained through a structural interview schedule. It is interesting to note that both male household heads as well as senior females were interviewed separately.

The results of the survey reveal a wealth of socio-economic information which should be useful for planning employment, training and assistance programmes for the refugees in Pakistan as well as for any initiatives that might be launched for the resettlement of refugees returning to Afghanistan. The survey shows that only 40 per cent of the males and 3 per cent of females above six years were literate. But despite relatively low literacy rates, especially among the adults, the Afghan refugees possess a wide range of skills. As might be expected, nearly 70 per cent of the male refugees were farmers. Of the rest, one in four claimed to have occupational skills such as driving, tailoring, carpentry, mechanics, teaching, engineering etc. No less than two thirds of women between the ages of 18 to 49 possessed such skills as tailoring, sewing, embroidery, weaving and spinning.

Nearly two thirds of the men and one out of every nine women were gainfully employed. In addition, most women did a variety of tasks at home. But employment for most refugees was irregular, part-time and low-paid. Nearly three quarters

of the household income excluding aid came from employment, 20 per cent from vegetable gardening, livestock and poultry etc., and the rest from remittances. There were considerable income inequalities: one third of the households earned less than 200 rupees per month while 14 per cent had incomes above 1000 rupees. A significant finding of the survey is that 10 per cent of the households did not earn any income at all.

The survey brings out that aid in the form of food, kerosene and cash played an important role in relieving poverty and in supplementing household incomes. But the official aid did not serve to even out income inequalities. This is understandable as aid is not related to household income, but not all refugees received aid. About one fifth of them were not registered for rations and not all the registered got their full entitlements. From a welfare point of view, a most important finding of the survey is that nearly 2 per cent of the refugees had neither income nor rations. This would amount to about 60,000 persons. Their survival presumably depended upon gifts, loans and begging. Many of the newly arrived refugees fell in this group.

Finally, in terms of interaction with the host society, the survey showed that 16 per cent claimed ties of friendship, while 5 per cent found themselves in conflict situations. Typically the conflicts revolved around access to firewood, pasture, drinking water and employment. Positive relationships in terms of friendship ties were most frequent in urban concentrations with long historical traditions of interaction between the two populations.

The study was made possible through co-operation between UNRISD, the Government of Pakistan and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees which also provided the bulk of the finance for the survey. I would like to take this opportunity to express our deep appreciation to the co-operating institutions and to numerous refugees, both men and women, and the survey staff without whose help this study would not have been possible.

Dharam Ghai
Director

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