

LIMEN

Journal of the Hungarian Migration Research Institute

3 (2021/1)



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MIGRATION RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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Migration Research Institute

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Limen is a semiannual International Journal
published by the Hungarian Migration Research Institute

Articles published in the journal reflect the views of their authors and do not
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Frontispiece:

The Ugandan army patrolling the refugee settlement in Rwamwanja, January
2020, photo: Sándor Jászberényi.

ISSN: 2732-0200

Founders:



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Refugee Host Community Development in Kenya: Approaches and Challenges

Gordon Ochieng' Ogotu

Abstract:

Implementing development programs aimed at improving the livelihoods of the refugee host communities remain a major challenge to better migration management in the global South despite being a pathway to a peaceful and efficient refugee integration process. While the integration efforts can be argued to have worked fairly well in developed nations, in the South, a lot of countries are still struggling with ensuring a smooth relationship between refugees and the host communities even as they grapple with development projects to counter the impacts of displacement in the communities. The long-term effect of poor migration management includes; tensions, conflicts, poverty and marginalization, which exist between and amongst settled refugees, camped refugees, and the host communities. Despite concerted efforts by state and non-state actors to improve the livelihoods of refugee host communities, challenges such as poor implementation frameworks and strategies, inadequate funds, corruption and poor coordination of development programs persist. As a result, stronger collaboration between governmental and non-governmental actors in host communities, allocation of more funds, and having stronger systems in place for effective implementation of development programs is needed.

Keywords: Kenya, development programs, refugee host communities

Introduction

The number of refugees and migrants is expected to grow tremendously in the near future even as reports indicate that economics or political conflicts no longer remain the primary driving factors behind migration.¹ Other factors such as climate change will drive millions into new destinations as the World Bank estimates that Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia will generate at least 143 million more climate migrants by 2050² while the International Organization for Migration (IOM) predicts 200 million additional environmental migrants by 2050. Further, a report by the United Nations Institute for Water, Environment

¹ FAO 2018; MILETTO Et al. 2017.

² WORLD BANK 2018.

and Health suggests that one billion people will be forced to migrate by 2050 due to a combination of water and climate-driven challenges and conflicts. These projections point to the rapidly increasing growth of refugees and migrants across the world while at the same time challenging the global governments and institutions to prepare for the future. Already, United Nations (UN) global trends report (2016; p. 2) indicates that the highest burden of the refugee crisis is being borne by the poorest and developing countries, making Africa an important region in addressing the impacts of displacement.

The success or failure of government responses to the growing numbers of refugees depends on the nature of the preparations in terms of policy frameworks and development interventions targeting both the refugee populations and most importantly the host communities, which are usually in low-income regions. This should, at the very best, be inclusive and effectively implemented because the arrival of refugees in host communities, while it should be celebrated and embraced, might turn out to be a major economic and social challenge to the hosts. According to a study conducted on 'Refugee-Host Community Causes of Tensions and Conflicts in Kakuma Refugee Camp', the three major causes of tensions between the two groups are: 1) feelings of economic privilege enjoyed by refugees from aid agencies; 2) fear of being harmed by the refugees because they outnumber the locals; 3) competition over the scarce resources such as land, water and energy.³ The study recommended that the refugee agencies should tailor their programs to include the development of both the host communities and refugees. The critical role of government involvement and approach that should be adopted in implementing such programs was, however, not highlighted in their study.

Socio-economically, the interaction between refugees and host communities can be beneficial or costly. Where the community is entrepreneurial and politically stable, the economic benefits can be greater as refugees, like the Somalis who are more likely to be self-employed and set up retail shops, will be trading with the locals thus boosting the economies of refugee centers.⁴ When the support for refugees is higher than that being offered to the locals, however, they gain an advantage in terms of employment and income as evident in Kakuma town where 62 percent of the Congolese, 38 percent of the Somalis, and 19 percent of the Sudanese are employed both by the UNHCR and implementing partner NGOs as compared to 40 percent of the Turkana (host community) making a living from selling firewood and charcoal. Further, compared to the host Turkana people in Kakuma, the Congolese and Somali refugees are better off based on metrics such as the

³ ALI – IMANA – OCHA 2017.

⁴ BETTS – OMATA – STERCK 2018.

number of meals per day, diversity of diet, ownership of clothing, mobile phone or television, and access to electricity.⁵ While refugees who have employment can adjust and integrate more and better than those who are unemployed, there's a gap that needs to be explored in cases where the refugees are employed but the host communities have high unemployment rates.

Shellito and Miller also highlight some of the negative outcomes of refugee presence as straining public and private services, causing physical and economic overcrowding, and increasing societal strife and potential for civil conflict.⁶ In refugee towns, such as Kakuma and Dadaab, which are surrounded by heavily armed pastoralists who periodically raid each other, incidents of conflicts can be very dangerous and of serious ramifications. This, therefore, is a time bomb that should be adequately addressed by the host governments by implementing development projects to the host communities to improve their livelihoods in response to the displacement impacts. Miller opines that to craft responses that to minimize the costs and risks suffered by host countries and communities, and to maximize the protection available to refugees, there should be a clear understanding of the impacts of hosting refugees.⁷

While the development responses to refugees in Sub-Saharan African countries are varied, complex, and have different outcomes, one of the most widely cited success stories is the Self-Reliance Strategy (SRS) implemented by the Government of Uganda (GoU) and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). The SRS, which is mostly applied in protracted refugee situations, is geared towards improving the standard of living of the people of refugee-hosting districts, including the refugees, through empowering them to be able to support themselves and establishing mechanisms that ensure integration of services for the refugees with those of the nationals.⁸ As a result of the strategy, in Uganda, the refugees have the right to work, attend school, and move freely.⁹ Despite the fact that the GoU and refugee agencies praise the SRS as having achieved success,¹⁰ Meyer argues that a critical tension between refugee self-reliance and refugee empowerment still exists.¹¹ Moreover, a deeper analysis of the model should be

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ SHELLITO 2016; MILLER 2018.

⁷ MILLER 2018.

⁸ UNHCR 2003, p 3.

⁹ CLEMENTS – SHOFFNER – ZAMORE 2016, p 49.

¹⁰ UNHCR 2004.

¹¹ MEYER 2006.

conducted 'based on an evidence-based understanding of what works, for whom and under what conditions'.¹²

In migration research, especially refugee studies in Sub-Saharan Africa, a lot of focus and attention has been paid to the impacts of the refugees on communities, but little focus has been on how the governments should respond in terms of development and policy frameworks. The few studies existing have only made recommendations for the governments but have not examined specific development responses in terms of the projects and policies that specifically target the host communities and have been or are being implemented by the governments. In Kenya, for example, the government and non-governmental organizations' responses focus on refugees living in camps and amongst the host communities, which in effect has sidelined the host communities' socio-economic needs and, in some instances, led to tensions between the refugees and the communities. In some towns, like Nakuru, Kajiado,¹³ Kakuma and Dadaab, which host refugees, the host communities have been neglected by the government's and NGOs' interventions resulting in issues such as rising land rates, rent levels, and dwindling business enterprises, and also an increased amount of crime have been witnessed amongst the host communities.¹⁴

This paper, therefore, evaluates the interventions carried out by actors in major refugee-hosting counties of Turkana and Garissa, the challenges involved and recommends what should be done to realize effective response to displacement impacts.

Overview of Turkana and Garissa Counties

The two counties of Turkana and Garissa are located in the North-Western and North-Eastern parts of Kenya respectively with a combined population of 1,768,329 persons (Turkana 926,976; and Garissa 841,353).¹⁵ The counties are dominantly inhabited by pastoralists who mainly depend on livestock for economic and cultural purposes. They rank amongst the most marginalized regions in Kenya having a Development Index score of 0.2697, and 0.4688 respectively compared to the national development index of 0.520.¹⁶ Further, the counties are prone to

¹² BETTS Et al. 2019a, p 6.

¹³ NGOTHO 2019.

¹⁴ MUSASIA 2019.

¹⁵ KPHC 2019.

¹⁶ CRA 2012, p 23.

droughts, famine, and climate-related impacts that displace thousands of people every year and lead to loss of lives.

In terms of security, the areas are generally prone to conflicts as there are small arms that are in the hands of pastoralists, which they use to carry out cattle rustling raids. Historically, due to inter-ethnic conflicts and neighboring war-prone areas in South Sudan and Somalia, Turkana, Garissa, and the neighboring regions have witnessed the proliferation of small arms giving Northern Kenya the highest prevalence of small arms.¹⁷ Intelligence and security reports have also identified Garissa county as one of the places where Al-Shabaab terrorists enter the country from Somalia, plan¹⁸ and execute their attacks.¹⁹

Together, these counties also host the highest percentage of the total refugees and asylum-seekers in Kenya, which is 494,289 with Dadaab camp (Garissa County) hosting 44 percent (218,873) while Kakuma and Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement (Turkana County) accounting for 40 percent, which amounts to 196,666.²⁰

Approaches to displacement impacts

There is a consensus that displacement requires a humanitarian response to address the emergency needs of the people affected but also a development response to address the social and economic effects of such displacement. Today, there are different development approaches adopted in response to displacement impacts by countries involved as Devictor opines that there is no commonly accepted development response and how it should be implemented despite displacement posing a challenge towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).²¹ In developed nations, due to stronger economies that can withstand the impacts, the approaches are different compared to the ones adopted by developing nations, some of which rely on aids and grants to adequately address the impacts.

Humanitarian response is becoming costly and the donor base is narrowing, even if in 2015, global humanitarian financing was 28 billion USD, which was 21 billion more than it was in the year 2001.²² Metois and Ruaudel argue that funding for the response to forced displacement has failed to meet the needs hence

¹⁷ WAIRAGU – NDUNG’U 2003, p 3.

¹⁸ ASTARIKO 2016.

¹⁹ SOLOMON 2020.

²⁰ UNHCR 2020a.

²¹ DEVICTOR 2017.

²² UNHCR 2020c.

resulting in a competition between immediate humanitarian response and long-term programming.²³ There is, therefore, a need to adopt approaches that will be sustainable while addressing the challenges faced by refugees, migrants, and the host communities. The approaches should be part of the broader response framework adopted by governments and partners, focused on alleviating poverty, and also leverage the capacity of the development institutions. They should also focus on addressing the medium-term socio-economic dimensions of the displacement crises.

Displaced people are a concern to the development institutions because of their vulnerability, which arises from their situation thus affecting their ability to engage in economic activities leading them into poverty. Some challenges faced are the loss of assets, trauma which arises from their ordeal, human rights violations because they are often scapegoated and not adequately protected by the laws of the host countries, and lack of access to economic opportunities due to limitations such as discrimination by the laws of the host countries or living in places that provide low income and are often remote. Consequently, the World Bank Group established two facilities to support development programs targeting refugees and host countries/communities. They are the Global Concessional Financing Facility (GCFF), which avails loans to low-middle income host countries, and a USD 2 billion made available through the International Development Association set aside for host countries. They will be disbursed through the traditional methods, mostly government bodies, to support institutional and policy changes to better manage crises.

In Kenya, before 2016, there has never been a clear development approach to the impacts of displacement. It can be described as a mixed and uncoordinated development response comprising the local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), aid agencies and donors, intergovernmental organizations, and international development partners. The focus of the development approach adopted in Kenya has been on self-reliance, host communities, inclusion into the nation's system (government-led), and addressing inequality as part of the national development plan.

I. Self-Reliance

Widely cited as a success story of improving the standards of living of the refugee host community districts in Uganda, including the refugees, the Self-reliance

²³ METOIS – RUADEL 2017.

approach seeks to empower the refugees and hosts to be able to self-sustain and establish mechanisms which ensure refugee services are integrated with those of the host communities. Implemented by the Government of Uganda and UNHCR, the approach seeks to address, amongst other topics, social issues such as education, health and community services; food security; burden-sharing; and poverty eradication. In Kenya, the same model was adopted in 2016 in Turkana County under the Kalobeyi Integrated Social and Economic Development Program (KISEDPP) spearheaded by the Government of Kenya, Turkana County, UNHCR, and partners.

Kalobeyi settlement was established to provide 'integrated, market-based opportunities to both refugees and the host community, and to support self-reliance for refugees'.²⁴ The approach in Kalobeyi offers cash-based interventions to meet basic needs, such as nutritional and housing needs, and supports special entrepreneurship training for refugees and hosts while in Kakuma refugee camp, the same approach is implemented in a slightly different way as it focuses on developing individual refugee abilities and creating an enabling environment that enhances access to livelihood opportunities and partnerships that help realize policy reforms that promote refugee integration.²⁵ In Dadaab refugee camp in Garissa County, the focus is on a global livelihood strategy where the actors implement market-based projects that enhance the financial, physical, social, and economic capital of target groups and general resilience building. For the urban refugees, the strategy is to build their capacities and also to advocate and to promote an environment that allows them to access opportunities.²⁶

While this approach has realized some levels of success both in Uganda and Kenya, it still has some structural challenges which require effective implementation and monitoring such as the involvement of host communities in the policy and program formulation stages, which is still low hence their voices and needs are not adequately listened to and addressed resulting in a low adoption of such programs. In regions like Turkana and Garissa where the people have experienced marginalization for a long time, the self-reliance approach needs to be inclusive and should not just target refugees as that has led to the emergence of a wealthy class of refugees and poor host community members.

Overdependency on aid support amongst the refugee and host communities is also a major challenge to the effective implementation of the self-reliance approach.

²⁴ BETTS et al 2019a.

²⁵ UNHCR 2020d.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

This is because they get used to the humanitarian assistance that they receive aimed at making their lives bearable from the moment they are received at the camp. The continued provision of such assistance makes the refugees dependent and any other program that seeks to divert their way of life to self-sustenance is often unwelcome. The situation gets complicated because, as compared to the beginning when they still have some funds some of them might have carried from their places of origin, as time goes by, this gets diminished thus making them rely only on cash interventions by aid or donor agencies. The same happens to the host communities that rely on the support from the humanitarian agencies operating in the refugee camp.

Poor labor policies and legal hurdles that limit the access to opportunities by refugees also derail the implementation of the self-reliance strategy. As Calabria opines, many refugees are still confronted by legal restrictions imposed by host governments which deny them or limit their right to work and freedom of movement, and even in countries where they have the right to work, high unemployment rates dim their hopes of landing a gainful employment.²⁷ In poor and marginalized counties like Turkana and Garissa, training refugees in entrepreneurship skills may not, therefore, achieve the intended outcome due to the general prevailing economic conditions of the region whereas, in urban centers, the refugees are also confronted with challenges such as the high cost of establishing a business, harassment by the local authorities, and taxes that hinder the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises, which most refugees engage in. To this end, the success of self-reliance highly depends on local circumstances and should not be an end in itself but a means to achieving sustainable livelihoods thus it should be a continuous process.

II. Host Community development approach

This approach mainly targets host communities that have been impacted by refugee inflow. Currently, the ongoing Kenya Development Response to Displacement Impacts Program (KDRDIP) is being implemented in Kakuma and Dadaab, which host the most camped refugees in the country. Developed mainly to 'improve access to basic social services, expand economic opportunities, and enhance environmental management for communities hosting refugees in the target areas of Kenya'²⁸, the implementation of this program began in 2018.

²⁷ CALABRIA 2019.

²⁸ THE KENYA NATIONAL TREASURY 2018, p 6.

Before the setting up of the camps in Kakuma and Dadaab and the eventual occupation by refugees, the ecosystem in the areas was balanced and could support nomadic pastoral activities. Consequently, this environment was systematically destroyed and degraded as the refugees harvested wood for fuel and construction thus impacting the lives of the host communities which depended on the same environment for support. Another development outcome that has deepened the division between refugees and host communities is the accessibility to better health care education by refugees while sidelining the hosts because trained experts prefer working in refugee facilities due to better remuneration packages.

In general, the refugees and host communities in Kenya are located in historically and economically marginalized areas experiencing food security challenges, poor social services and economic infrastructure, and a significant dependency on refugee camps for social and economic opportunities. It is therefore against this backdrop that the DRDIP was designed and is being implemented. It is being done in collaboration with local organizations and selective international partners that have a history and a better working relationship with the target communities. The international partners have been purposely selected to ensure that a repeat of a similar approach that leads to only refugees gaining doesn't recur.

Whereas this program has realized significant successes such as mobilizing the community members to embrace the objectives, enhancing the capacities of the local social groups, promoting women and youth empowerment, and improving social infrastructures in the areas, it faces structural and systemic challenges that could jeopardize the effective delivery of the project goals. Some of the challenges are the dependency attitude that has been cultivated by the aid and humanitarian agencies supporting refugees and host communities in the two areas. Structurally, there is a poor coordination of activities of the projects, which involves different units at the national, county, and sub-county units. Consequently, the program is not being delivered effectively and efficiently as many teams are involved, which creates a program implementation process. System-related challenges on issues such as the quality of the human resources also hamper the effective delivery of the program goals.

Inadequate policies and legal frameworks at the devolved levels (county governments) where the program is being implemented have created a loophole for exploitation by those involved in the implementation thus creating room for

corruption and poor service deliveries. This has also resulted in non-compliance with the project requirements by beneficiaries targeted by the project, further leading to a loss of funds that would have otherwise been channeled to other activities. In some instances, the beneficiaries have misused the funds received for unintended purposes.

III. Inclusion into the nation's development plan

Before prioritizing migration affairs and related programs, the refugee host community development approaches were incorporated into the national development plans of the country. Some of the documents are the national budget, the Kenya Vision 2030, and the Kenyan foreign policy. Through the national budget, the Government of Kenya has always allocated resources and funds to facilitate development programs in underdeveloped/marginalized regions some of which happen to host refugee camps. Further, through the Ministry of Immigration and Interior Government, funds have been directly channeled to various state departments such as the State Department of Special Programs and the Department of Refugee Affairs to complement other efforts to respond to the impacts of displacement by improving the livelihoods of the host communities and refugees.

The Kenya Vision 2030 is a development blueprint formulated in 2007 covering the period 2008 to 2030 intending to transform 'Kenya into a newly industrializing middle-income country providing a high-quality life to all its citizens by the year 2030'.²⁹ It is further divided into three pillars; economic, social, and political. Though not spelled out in the vision document, the development responses to displacement have been included in economic and social pillars where the country seeks to maintain economic growth and to ensure equitable social development. To this end, the government included development programs targeting host communities and refugees considering that both the Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps were set up before the Vision 2030 was formulated (1991³⁰ and 1992³¹ respectively).

As part of its role in promoting regional integration and multilateralism, Kenya has ratified international treaties that relate to refugees and thus adopted them in its foreign policy. The treaties include, amongst others, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD),

²⁹ THE KENYA VISION 2030, p 1.

³⁰ UNHCR 2020a.

³¹ UNHCR 2020e.

the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, the Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, and the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non – International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II). Further, under the regional integration cornerstone, Kenya recognizes and appreciates the role of some of the regional economic and political blocs such as its 'principal avenues for pursuing its foreign policy goals'.³² As part of its role as a founding member of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), it commits 'to continue to provide leadership and support to IGAD as an effective regional tool for confronting challenges to sustainable development in the region'.³³ These challenges include displacement as a result of conflicts, refugee management, peace, and stability.

Despite having a development blueprint, a comprehensive foreign policy document, and setting aside budgetary allocations through its state departments such as Special Programs, this approach has proven to be very ineffective in dealing with the development response to impacts of displacement in refugee host communities. The fact that it is not targeted and is uncoordinated makes it difficult to monitor the development responses thus achieving little impact. The corruption challenge in Kenya's public sector also remains a big impediment to the effective and efficient delivery of services to refugee host communities thus a lot of funds are stolen from the public coffers that would have otherwise been put to good use. Additionally, because the government budget is overstretched due to many development projects being implemented across the country and revenue challenges, the development programs targeting refugee host communities in the country do not receive enough funds for effective implementation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, refugee host community development in Kenya experiences a myriad of challenges that need to be addressed for effective and efficient development. The Government of Kenya, which should take a leading role in refugee affairs, has left the role to non-state actors such as non-governmental organizations and development partners who mainly focus on the refugees at the expense of the host communities. In Turkana County, for example, the county's administration

³² MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS KENYA 2016, p 29.

³³ *Ibid.*

has significantly reduced the allocation of resources to Turkana West sub-county which hosts the Kakuma refugee camp because the county directors wrongfully believe that the host community in that area also benefits from the refugee projects being implemented by the non-governmental organizations and other agencies working in Kakuma.

The approaches that have been adopted too, have also realized little success due to poor planning, coordination, and implementation. Coupled with the high levels of corruption in the country, the refugee host community development responses have been turned into cash cows rather than humanitarian and development projects.

Based on the analysis of the refugee host community development approaches and challenges in Kenya, this paper recommends a more coordinated approach jointly led by the government, development partners, and other non-governmental agencies with interest in forced displacement impacts and migration governance. The non-governmental agencies operating in Turkana and Garissa counties should support and collaborate further with the government agencies as working in isolation and leaving out the host communities has a negative economic and social impact on them and thus creates a division between the refugees and the host communities. Additionally, the existing government institutions that spearhead refugee and host community affairs should be strengthened more with operational policy frameworks, sufficient funds, and effective monitoring systems to ensure effective implementation of the development projects targeting refugee host communities.

The county governments hosting the two refugee camps should support the host communities further instead of reducing their budgetary allocations for such areas because they need economic and social empowerment due to the displacement impacts which have interrupted their livelihoods. This can be achieved through deeper collaboration and partnership with the non-governmental agencies supporting refugees in the regions to ensure that they also include the host communities in their development planning.

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