

When are Visitors a Blessing? An Examination of Hosts' Perceptions on the Socio-Economic Impact of Forced Migration in Garissa County, Kenya

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.906000362>

Received: 12 August 2024; Accepted: 26 August 2024; Published: 17 July 2025

ABSTRACT

Among scholars, practitioners and policy makers, the conclusion that the East and Horn of Africa is both an origin and host to refugees, asylum seekers and migrants is undisputed. Studies delving into the nature of humanitarian assistance, protection and the search for durable solutions are replete with explanations on the nature and effects of forced migration but mostly focus on migrants. Notably, there is scanty or anecdotal explanatory research on hosts' perceptions of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. There is a dearth of scholarly contributions on the perspectives of the host communities on the impact forced migration has on them. This paper utilizes the social exchange theory in conceptualizing the basis for understanding how and why hosts perceive refugees and displaced people as either impacting positively or negatively on their lives. The concept of 'social exchange as a frame of reference' dwells on the transaction mode (resulting in a cost-benefit analysis) that the hosts engage in while evaluating their relationship from a reward-punishment scheme. This study investigated the relationship between the hosts and the refugees, asylum seekers and migrants by asking questions relating to how successful the relationship has been in terms of rewards, how overt or inert stimuli from the surrounding has contributed to generosity or hostility towards the visitors, whether the presence of visitors led to deprivation or satiation on the part of the hosts and the amount in terms of value resulting from hosting refugees. Data for this study was obtained through interviews, focused group discussions and informal discussions with residents of Garissa County in Kenya. The study also benefitted from secondary data. This study contributes to greater understanding in the current yet nascent debate on the impact of refugees on host communities from an approval/disapproval prism.

Keywords: Forced migration, social exchange, deprivation, satiation, cost-benefit.

INTRODUCTION

There is limited explanatory research on host communities' perceptions of refugee impacts. This has resulted on limited or underdeveloped theoretical explanations of host community perceptions about refugees and hence their relations. This contribution presents a social exchange model anchored on the socio-economic exchange relations. The paper is modeled from literature social exchange relations in an attempt to arrive at these perceptions and which in turn may explain the relations and benefit policy makers in designing refugee camps around the globe and particularly in the East and Horn of Africa region. During the past decade researchers have given attention to the impacts of refugees on host environments. This attention has helped in developing and operationalizing humanitarian responses towards the refugee challenge. The idea is to mitigate the adverse effects of forced displacement and the conditions surrounding it to be made favourable especially to the host communities. Sarah Deardorff Miller (2018) agrees with the above by indicating that "understanding the impact of hosting refugees is at the center of crafting responses that minimize the costs and risks assumed by host countries and communities, maximize the protection available to refugees and utilize resources efficiently and effectively" (2018:1). However, in order for this to happen reference is made to available data, which is more often than not scarce. Further, extensive literature focusing on host countries and not specifically on the host-community has obscured the direct reference, in terms of responses, directed at the host communities. This in turn has made it elusive to craft development-oriented responses which are holistic and which take seriously into account the needs of host communities. In some cases, this has led to frosty relations between refugees and their host-communities as indicated by Aukot (2003) that there is an imbalance

in receiving humanitarian support the Turkana region, which hosts Kakuma refugee camp. When the refugees receive food rations during the prolonged drought seasons and the host community does not, there is an imbalance created and in fact this leads to what he refers to as “scapegoating” and the portrayal of refugees as a source of political, economic, social and cultural problems (2003:75). Aukot (2003) goes further to indicate that because of the preceding, the host community have in turn raised complaints attributed to the refugees’ presence and have complained against the UNHCR, NGOs and the Government of Kenya (GoK). This leads to sentiments such as “it is better to be a refugee than a Turkana in Kakuma (Ibid).

The paper begins by examining the environment of Dadaab refugee camp and a deep expose’ of the backgrounds of the hosts as well as the refugees themselves. The contribution then proceeds to provide a framework against which data was collected and analysed: the social exchange frame of reference. This is followed by a section describing the methodology adopted in gathering and analysing data. A discussion of the findings follows this section before the paper makes a conclusion.

Dadaab Refugee Camp, The Hosts and the Refugees

Garissa County is inhabited majorly by the Somali pastoralists. These pastoralist communities are settled in about twenty major villages which are also within fifty kilometers radius from the refugee camp (Government of Denmark, Government of Kenya & Government of Norway, 2018). According to the Second County Integrated Plan (2018) Garissa County falls in the northeaster region of Kenya. It is one of the three counties in the region. It covers an area of 44,174.1 Kilometers squared and lies between latitude 10 58’ N and 20 1’ S and longitude 380 34’ E and 410 34’ E. The county borders the Republic of Somalia to the East, Lamu county to the south, Tana River county to the west, Isiolo county to the northwest and Wajir county to the north. The area is characterized by aridness, flatness and has no hills or valleys and the seasonal Laghas as well as the Tana River Basin. The region is generally semi-arid. The sandy soils and scattered shrubs support livestock production. Temperatures are high through ought the year and range from twenty to thirty-nine degrees centigrade.

The integrated county plan indicates that Garissa has six sub-counties including Fafi, Garissa, Ijara, Lagdera, Balambala and Dadaab. Hulugho serves as an administrative unit. Masalani and Dadaab are the two main townships (2018). According the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) (2017) the county has a projected population of 871,644 people. This consists of 468, 489 males and 403,155 females (2018). The integrated plan (2018) reiterates that urbanization is high and as a result causes a strain on the social and physical infrastructure. Dadaab remains unique for the reason that it holds the refugees who are mainly from Somalia. The refugees freely interact with the locals. They are involved in trade and also intermarry with the locals.

Dadaab is located approximately five hundred kilometers from Nairobi and eighty kilometers from the Somali border (Waswa, 2012). According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) (2018), as at the end of January 2018, the Dadaab refugee complex has a population of 235,269 registered refugees and asylum seekers. The camp was established to primarily cater for the refugee influx from neighbouring Somalia. Somali refugees comprise approximately 97.5% percent of the entire refugee population. Other nationalities include Ethiopians, Sudanese, Congolese, Burundians, Ugandans and Eritreans. The dominant religion is Islam while a handful Christians are also present in the camp. The population of Somalis is predominantly nomadic and pastoralists with a few pockets of farmers and traders (Waswa, 2012). The complex consists of four camps; Dagahaley, Ifo, Ifo 2 and Hagadera. Dagahaley, Ifo and Ifo 2 are located in Dadaab sub-county while Hagadera is located in Fafi sub-county. Ifo, Dahagaley and Hagadera started hosting refugees in the 1990s while Ifo 2 was established in 2011 after the famine in Somalia.

Host community-refugee relations are intertwined and complex given their kinship identities as well as religious affiliations (Waswa, 2012). This can be used to explain the ease with which movement between and across the border is conducted.

Theoretical Framework: The social exchange frame of reference

This contribution utilizes the social exchange frame of reference. Among the notable scholars who have advanced this frame of reference include Levi’ Strauss (1969), Homans (1961), Blau (1964) and Emerson

(1972). Blau (1964) summarizes social exchange thus: such an exchange is about actions that yield rewards from others. This implies a two-sided relationship that is “mutually contingent” and “mutually rewarding” and involves “transactions” as well as “exchange” (Emerson 1976:336). In the same context and referring to the host community refugee situation, Betts, Omata and Sterk (n.d.) agree that “in all contexts the degree of perceived or actual economic contribution – and the distribution of costs and benefits among the host community – influence host community refugee relations”. According to Emerson (1976) the variants in the framing of social exchange as a frame of reference provide a basis for its sustained application. Blau (1964) emphasizes a technical economic analysis, Homans (1961) is interested in the psychology of behavior and looks at group processes while Levi Strauss (1969) is interested in the structure that underpins kinship systems, myths and customs as used to explain the perpetuation of social institutions. Dominant in the field of sociology, anthropology and social psychology, the frame is useful in understanding how individuals perceive resource exchanges amongst them both as individuals and groups. This is done in situations where there is some form of interaction. In utilizing social exchange frame of reference this paper is able to accommodate both the negative as well as positive perceptions as well as examine relationships at both the individual and community levels. Sutton (1967) provides for why exchange can be a social characteristic used in defining the social characteristics between a host and a visitor. According to him this characterization provides “either an opportunity for rewarding and satisfying exchanges, or it may stimulate and reinforce impulses to exploitation on the part of the host and, to suspicion and resentment on the part of the visitor” (Sutton 1967:221).

Additionally, I borrow from the work of John Ap (1992) who examines residents’ perceptions on tourism impacts through the social exchange frame of reference and develops a model of the social exchange process. In so doing I extend and apply his thinking to examine hosts’ perceptions on the socio-economic impacts of hosting refugees in the Dadaab Complex in Kenya. In view of this model, in order for responsive humanitarian response and especially integration to occur, it means that critical exchanges must happen. The community must participate in refugee affairs with a view to improving their economic and social situation. In so doing, they become critical in the sustenance of the humanitarian agenda in their locale. This is because, on the other hand, the hosts can easily become a stumbling block to the humanitarian agenda by becoming hostile. At the same time, they may act as advocates for integration once they see the value of hosting refugees. Their satisfaction therefore becomes critical and pivotal to the entire program. From a cost-benefit analysis both the hosts and refugees must find value in their interactions. This contributes greatly to the political, social, economic as well as the cultural growth of the region they are in.

In relation to the discussion above, John Ap (1992) develops the social exchange model (see Figure 1) in whose basic components are need satisfaction, exchange relation, consequences of exchange and the no-exchange outcome. In this view, I seek to discuss the hosts perceptions on whether their needs have been satisfied by hosting refugees, the nature of the relationship in terms of the exchange that has benefited them or not, the consequences of these exchanges whether positive or negative and, in which case the negative experience may be termed as a no-exchange outcome.

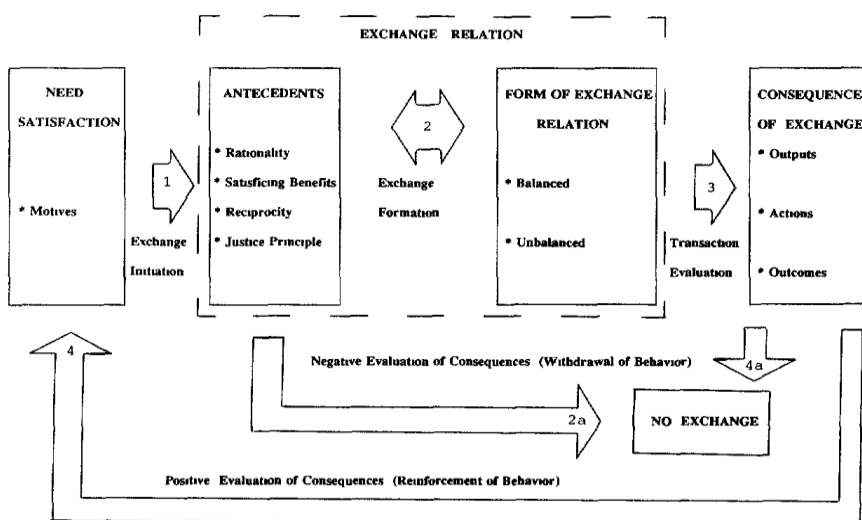


Figure 1: Figure of the model exchange process. Source: John Ap (1992).

STUDY METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study investigated the relationship between the hosts and the refugees, asylum seekers and migrants by asking questions relating to how successful the relationship has been in terms of rewards, how overt or inert stimuli from the surrounding has contributed to generosity or hostility towards the visitors, whether the presence of visitors led to deprivation or satiation on the part of the hosts and the amount in terms of value resulting from hosting refugees. The design of this contribution is descriptive-analytic. The data was gathered over a period of time (July to December, 2018). A series of in-depth interviews, focused group discussion and informal discussions were conducted with representatives of the host community living in Garissa County. Secondary data was also obtained from reports, newspapers, journals and books. Purposive sampling was used to identify the primary participants. The categories of participants included: chiefs, national government officers, NGO workers, community representatives, representatives of community groups, members of youth groups, business people, teachers and select members of the communities. A total of fifteen individuals participated in semi-structured one-on-one interviews and another twenty-six participated in three focused group discussions. The data is organized along thematic areas corresponding to how successful the relationship has been in terms of rewards, how overt or inert stimuli from the surrounding has contributed to generosity or hostility towards the visitors, whether the presence of visitors has led to the deprivation or satiation on the part of the hosts and the amount in terms of value resulting from hosting the visitors.

The study adopted the phenomenological approach because it was interested in what the participants experiences are and how they described those lived experiences. The findings below contribute to greater understanding in the current yet nascent debate on the impact of refugees on host communities from an approval/disapproval prism.

The realities of host community refugee relations in Dadaab Camp

Generally, the presence of refugees in Kenya has received mixed reactions. On the one hand they are viewed as an economic burden while on the other they are seen as offering competition for the few jobs available. At the same time from the evidence available it shows that there have been economic benefits for the host communities coupled with mixed social benefits (O'Callaghan & Sturge, 2018). The Dadaab camp has yielded socio-economic impacts on the host community (Waswa, 2012). The UNHCR (2012) also indicates that due to the emergency operations mode since the drought in 2011, the influx recorded up to 1,500 arriving per day and this easily impacted on the socio-economic situation of the hosts. A tripartite study conducted by the Government of Denmark, Government of Kenya and Government of Norway Report in 2010, knowledge on the socio-economic impact of the camp is scanty and largely anecdotal. They indicate both negative and positive impacts on the camp situation to the host communities. The findings of this study are an added step in collating such data to inform decision making processes. In the overall, and because of the kinship ties, the host community and the refugees have an intertwined relationship. They share a language, culture and religion. They also have blood relations across the border and hence will freely move in and out of the two countries. To them the border is imaginary and does not seem to impede on their interactions. Additionally, all or most of those referred to as the host community households have members of their extended family in Somalia. They also share resources regularly in both good and bad times. According the tripartite study conducted by the three governments, interestingly, the host community, though in reality may come from distant environs, prefer to move and coalesce around the camp environs because of the socio-economic benefits that accrue from living around the camp. The following are the detailed findings of this study.

The rewards

“Hali yetu ni ile ya mgeni aje, mwenyeji apone. Sisi kama wasomali tulisahaulika zamani sana. Kuwepo kwa hawa wenzetu imefanya mashirika za kigeni kufika hapa na angalao tukapata nafuu” (Our situation is one where we can say that when the visitor comes the host gets reprieve. As the Somali people we were long forgotten. The arrival of our friends made various international organizations to also come to their aid and then we too got some help)

(Interview conducted in August, 2018)

The above statement alludes the long marginalization of the region and the fact that by receiving refugees the host community has also benefitted from the refugee presence. This is corroborated by various studies that have been conducted. In one study there is an indication that the nature of services and attention given to the camps by the humanitarian industry has rendered the camp a natural center of attraction for the host community with a view to gain maximum from the benefits that come with the camp life. Indeed, the urban way of life experienced in the camp, as compared to the rural-oriented activities in the host community settlements has continued to attract the host community to the camp. As a result, social interaction is at its peak (Government of Denmark, Government of Kenya & Government of Norway, 2018). The growth of the camp has spurred increased investment in the host community infrastructure by virtue of the operations by the humanitarian agencies operating in the region (Waswa, 2012).

There has been increased pressure on the existing, yet limited, water resources in the area accompanied by related human and livestock health problems as a result of the loss of livelihoods for the host communities. However, conflict over the scarce resources has also been experienced (Waswa, 2012).

Given their purchasing power, which may partly be as a result of the transfers they receive through foreign aid and remittances (O'Callaghan & Sturge, 2018) the refugee communities have evolved into major markets for the dairy products of the host communities (Waswa, 2012). *"Mimi kama mfanyi biashara ninauza bidhaa kama maziwa, mafuta na mara nyingine ninauza mifugo kwenye butchery. Wa customer wangu hi hawa marafiki zetu. Kwa hiyo nina pata biashara kutoka kwao"* (I am a businessman and I sell merchandise such as milk, oil and sometimes I sell animals to be slaughtered in the butcheries. My main customers are our friends and so I mainly transact business with them)

(Interview conducted in August, 2018)

These sentiments are also corroborated by another study conducted in 2018. The study also found out that the host community sells livestock, milk, firewood and donkey cart services. Pastoral production systems have been developed in the host community to serve the needs of the refugee community (Government of Denmark, Government of Kenya & Government of Norway, 2018) thereby resulting in closer interaction of the hosts and the refugees. There is also availability of cheap food for the host community as a result of the subsidized food rations given to the refugees. All the above has also led to dietary changes and less dependence on meat and milk as the only food (Ibid). The above means that refugees have indeed been an economic asset for host community economies (O'Callaghan & Sturge, 2018). In a study conducted by Enghoff et. al. (2010) the researchers indicate that the economic benefit for the host community in Dadaab stood at US Dollars fourteen million in 2010. This then results in a considerable amount of economic relations and transactions between the host community and the refugees.

The host and the refugee community have adopted formal and informal avenues for negotiating and resolving conflicts. The leadership by the elders from both sides have found an amicable way to resolve issues related to resource rights and the division of jobs and contracts. Through such an arrangement, the refugees are thus able to invest and generate income (Government of Denmark, Government of Kenya & Government of Norway, 2018).

Overt and/or inert stimuli from the surrounding versus generosity or hostility towards the visitors

Humanitarian organization have mounted programs, for example aimed at improving nutrition and sanitation both in the camps and the host community (Waswa, 2012). This has led to a benefit on the part of the host community which traditionally suffered historical marginalization. Organizations dealing with health have extended services to the host community (Ibid). Additionally, a number of the refugees have been registered as refugees themselves and therefore benefit from the food ratios offered as relief food by the humanitarian organizations. A number of the members of the host community have also gained employment within the humanitarian organizations operating in the camp (Ibid; Government of Denmark, Government of Kenya & Government of Norway, 2018). This has greatly improved their otherwise fragile livelihoods and ensured a sustained lifestyle.

Deprivation or satiation & Value resulting from hosting refugees

Access to water, once experienced by the host community, has been improved to a large extent. Agencies working in the region have developed water initiatives in the interventions and host communities now have improved access to water (Government of Denmark, Government of Kenya & Government of Norway, 2018). At the same time the agencies have also offered education opportunities which can also be accessed by host communities in the camp.

On the contrary, to the earlier indication that there has been job creation, in some cases the host communities resent that the refugees receive preferential support in terms of services and job opportunities (Kamau & Fox, 2013). This may have led to the serious wealth disparities between the refugees and the host community (Ikanda, 2008). This may have led to the host community support for the repatriation of refugees from Dadaab camp (Ibid).

CONCLUSION

Garissa County is a unique setting where the refugee community and the host community have a complex, intertwined and interlocking relationship that presents humanitarian agencies as well as policy makers with an opportunity for conceptual stretching of the phenomenon that is refugee camps. It further raises pertinent issues about refugeehood; given the fact that for some of the Somali refugees living in Garissa home is just about one hundred kilometers and a place where they occasionally visit. This in turn bears certain unique perceptions as well as implications on their relations with their host community. This contribution looked into the socio-economic impacts of hosting refugees on local populations. It is an area underexplored but which has great potential for humanitarian response programming and policy making. The contribution found out that the socio-economic impacts of hosting are both positive and negative. For example, the indication that although the refugee presence in Garissa has sometimes been viewed as a burden, particularly by the political class, the presence of the refugee community has also ushered in more business opportunities for the host community, increased access to employment, led to improved infrastructure and led to better health and education delivery.

In summary, the overall perceptions of the host communities about the presence of refugees in Garissa County can be said to be that their needs have been satisfied by hosting refugees and they have benefited both economically and socially from their transactions with the refugee community. The consequences of these transactions have been both positive and negative. The positive impacts however outweigh the negative impacts. This is exemplified by the occasional complaints the host community raises about the refugees. In other words, the no-exchange outcome is invariably insignificant according to the findings of this study.

The above considerations lead this study to a suggestion that a rethink of, for example the encampment policy needs to be considered. While there have been security concerns by the Kenyan government in relation to the presence of refugees in the county, there could be a window available to rethinking this policy and creatively moving towards the integration of the Somali refugees in Garissa County. More importantly, it is critical to mention that some of the refugee families are in their third generation. The next question to think about is the issue of capabilities, vulnerabilities and resilience. How can humanitarian agencies as well as policy makers, given the economic benefits accruing from the refugee presence, work at improving the capabilities of the host community, reduce their vulnerabilities and ultimately their resilience to be able to absorb the shocks that come with hosting such a large number of refugees.

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