ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF URBAN REFUGEES ON HOST COMMUNITY: CASE OF SOMALI REFUGEES IN EASTLEIGH, 1991-2012
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ABSTRACT
In many countries in the world, against a backdrop of chronic unaddressed urban poverty, rapid urbanization is giving rise to normalized daily violence and low-level armed conflict in densely populated slums. A sizeable minority of the people coping with these conditions are refugees who relocate from their home country in search for safety in foreign countries. To this group of people, the urban context presents unique barriers to the economic success, but also some significant advantages. In Nairobi, where this study was conducted, refugee and displaced people suffer from limited freedom of movement due to the threats of petty crime and violence, armed gangs and police harassment. Thousands of female refugee and youth are employed as domestic workers, where they say their rights are trampled. These forces limit the refugee’s ability to socialize and earn a living and access services. Most refugees are at a major educational disadvantage in Nairobi and many never manage to return to school, as they face various barriers. As the key to accessing economic opportunities, Somali refugees in Nairobi developed social networks. This study sought to establish how relationships between urban refugees and more established local communities affect refugee access to key services and resources. In contrast to camps, where refugees are relatively isolated from local host communities and are more dependent on assistance from humanitarian agencies to meet their basic needs, Somali refugees in urban Nairobi typically depend more on social networks, relationships and individual agency to re-establish their livelihoods. This study has explored the conditions under which refugee-host relations promoted or inhibited refugee access to local services and other resources. It also considered how positive impacts of these evolving relationships was nurtured and developed to improve economic outcomes for both the host communities and refugees in Nairobi.

The research was a case study of the impact of the refugee stay on the economic livelihood of Eastleigh. It was guided by three objectives namely; investigating the relationship between the refugee population in Eastleigh the area’s economy, examining the economic effects of urban refugees on host community in Eastleigh and investigating the relationships between the refugees and the local communities. This study was anchored on refugee aid and development theory. This theory calls for strategies linking refugee relief programs with local development policies as was first used by Betts Robert and Gorman Robert during the second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa (ICARA II) in 1984. These authors asserted that refugee assistance
should be development-oriented and should take into account host population needs. The theory of refugee and development draws attention to the situation of host populations benefiting economically from refugee presence against the fundamental assumption that refugees represent a problem or a burden, rather than an opportunity. The methodology adopted in this research was pragmatic approach where both quantitative and qualitative methods were applied in order to capture the key elements of the research purpose and objectives. Quantitative come in because there was need to establish the approximate population of refugees living in Eastleigh. This required historical data which was based on factual information. To get this factual information, the study heavily relied on secondary and primary data sources. The research also used in-depth interviews with key informants through individual and focused group discussion. For efficiency the study utilized a questionnaire approach which assisted in capturing the required data.