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Policy Recommendations for Strengthening Resilience and Self-Sufficiency Among Refugees in Protracted Camps and Their Hosts

March 2020

This publication was produced at the request of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). It was prepared independently by The Research Technical Assistance Center (RTAC) consortium.

Executive Summary

From June to October 2019, the University of Notre Dame's Department of Anthropology and Pulte Institute for Global Development—on behalf of The Research Technical Assistance Center (RTAC)—implemented extensive field research in Kakuma, Kalobeyei, and Dadaab refugee camps in northern Kenya to understand the sources of, barriers to, and opportunities for enhanced resilience and self-sufficiency of refugees and host communities in regions of protracted encampment. Supplemented by a literature review of past and current development approaches and academic studies, the research team produced recommendations for donor nations seeking to increase the self-sufficiency of refugees and hosts in these contexts.

The 2016 Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), enacted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), donor nations, humanitarian relief organizations, and other stakeholders, makes the recommendations produced by this research both timely and urgent. CRRF is an ambitious paradigmatic shift away from the protracted encampment that has characterized most relief-humanitarian approaches and commits signatory bodies and nations to provide safe, dignified, and sustainable lives for those fleeing catastrophe and seeking refuge and asylum outside their countries of origin. Specifically, CRRF calls for relief organizations, donors, and other stakeholders to work closely with signatory refugee-hosting nations to:

- Include/integrate refugees into the host communities from the very beginning.
- Make refugee camps exceptions to the norm and only temporary responses to emergencies.
- Enable refugees to thrive in the host countries, not just survive.
- Lower the risks of protracted stay and dependence on humanitarian aid.

Refugee self-sufficiency or self-reliance is one of the primary goals of the CRRF and is seen as *the* viable and sustainable alternative to the dominant practice of protracted encampment that characterizes recent and historical humanitarian relief responses. However, far too often, the concepts of resilience and self-sufficiency are viewed from an economic perspective, with other factors, such as social capital, psychosocial support, and nutrition, being largely minimized in programmatic interventions. Self-sufficiency is embedded within larger intersecting social, cultural, political, medical, and environmental systems of resilience that shape and, in turn, are shaped by economic activities. These are just a few of the factors that inform the resilience capabilities of peoples living in restrictive, marginalized, and environmentally harsh conditions that are often mentioned but not rigorously mapped within most current approaches. **There is hence a significant gap in our understanding of the complexity of how the diversity of personal circumstances or the non-economic and psychosocial aspects specific to refugees' and host communities' well-being may affect pathways to refugee and host community self-sufficiency. This gap, in turn, forms a barrier to feasible, actionable, and implementable policy at local, regional, and national levels.**

The desk review and field research in northern Kenya revealed three core takeaways for future programs seeking to enhance resilience and self-sufficiency among protracted refugees and their hosts. These takeaways are presented below and summarized in the subsequent sections.

- The protracted encampment of refugees in host nations usually takes place in **disabling environments,** and programming design must account for economic, social, political, and cultural realities on the ground.
- **Refugee and host mental health** are neglected in terms of both understanding the prevalence, severity, and impact of mental illness in protracted camps and designing programs that prioritize psychosocial support.
- **Social capital** can be a key source of resilience for refugees and host communities, and social capital and access to formal and informal financial systems are strongly embedded in each other and should not be delinked.

Disabling Environments

The protracted encampment of refugees in host nations usually takes place in marginalized regions, where refugees are restricted in their abilities to move or seek sustainable livelihood or subsistence activities. The path to enhanced resilience, self-sufficiency, and sustainable integration for the roughly 400,000 refugees living in Kakuma, Kalobeyei, and Dadaab is complex, given:

- The endemic conflict, political, and social marginalization, and general impoverishment of the Turkana and Kenyan Somali hosts.
- The complexities of managing and providing relief and development within large, densely populated refugee camps surrounded by impoverished hosts.
- The structural and environmental limitations posed by the socio-political-economic complexities and physical harshness of the region.

According to informants, interventions usually did not account for ground realities of **disabling environments,** including police interactions (abuse, corruption, assault), low quality of healthcare for both refugees and hosts, the high frequency of shocks and high chronicity of stressors, and the secondary impact of stressors and shocks on individuals with jobs or income, who face constant stress to help extended kin and hence show an inability to save, invest, or build due to constant attrition of resources. Other contributing factors to low resilience and self-sufficiency included:

- Inadequate nutritional security, which serves as a stressor and a cause of diminished energy levels and daily productivity.
- The irregularity of jobs, even those within INGOs/NGOs, the relief sector, or private industry.
- Discrimination and social exclusion (within and between refugees and host communities in each county).
- The shortage and low quality of government and public infrastructure or external support systems in health, education, social safety nets, and financial services available to the bulk of the populations.
- The dominance of local economies by politically connected ethnic business groups with access to global supply chains and credit.

Although these ground realities are well-known, most livelihood programming and other external interventions still appear to be designed with the primary assumption of enabling environments, or at least without an adequate understanding of the specific realities in Turkana or Garissa. Many interviewees revealed having undergone and completed training for non-existent local jobs or receiving training that relied on outsiders who lacked an understanding of the local context.

Insufficient attention to ground realities impacts the effectiveness of many agricultural programs as well, as agriculture interventions are typically guided by the concept of intensive agriculture for markets. While this is a noble goal, the environmental limitations (e.g., water shortages, land quality) pose almost insurmountable blocks to such developments. Small-scale agriculture and incremental growth models, particularly those targeting women and youth, offer a more locally feasible and culturally appropriate strategy.

Mental Health

Various studies have shown that displaced populations tend to suffer disproportionately from psychobiological stressors and shocks, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), complex PTSD (CPTSD), depression, negativity, harmful sleeping patterns, and anxiety. These serious mental illnesses arise from violence experienced before and during displacement, other shocks experienced during displacement, and the ongoing shocks of protracted living in volatile, restrictive, and resource-deprived areas. Along with these, refugees and hosts have to contend with daily stressors such as lack of access to adequate nutrition, security, infrastructural support, education, employment, and movement, along with other stressors such as sickness or death in the social network. The combined impacts of the shocks and stressors over a protracted period of restricted movement and economic circumscription have a significant and detrimental impact on peoples' abilities to respond to incentives and to generate the discipline to engage with opportunities and interventions.

The research revealed the insufficient priority given to the psychosocial health of refugees and impoverished hosts. Most refugees and hosts have experienced or witnessed violence and conflict at first hand. Such trauma, if untreated, whether through counseling, medication, or other culturally-appropriate and humane modalities, mitigates common sources of resilience. In other words, the physiological and psychological impacts of shocks and stresses stand in the way of greater well-being and affect the individual's ability to respond to opportunities or to show consistency in work or labor duties. This is perhaps the most understudied and examined barrier to resilience and self-sufficiency. Significant investment is needed to truly understand the prevalence, severity, and impact of mental illness in protracted encampment and identify effective modalities for delivering clinical, psychosocial support.

Social Capital

Many relief and development officials view the concepts of resilience and self-sufficiency from an economic perspective, with other factors, such as social capital, being largely minimized in programmatic interventions. Emphasis continues to be placed on studying successful entrepreneurial individuals and groups in refugee camps and using these examples as programming models that can lead to successful emulation of such individuals and groups within the general population. This approach often fails to understand the role of social capital and social support networks in explaining the success of these thriving individuals as outliers who show adaptive or even transformative resilience. This resilience comes from greater access to social forms of capital from local, regional, and global networks, due to their membership in certain ethnic groups or higher economic classes, and/or possession of particular skills that are reinforced by their membership in these groups/classes. As such, these individuals or groups have far greater

capacities to withstand the various economic, social, health, and psychological impacts of the chronic stressors and shocks, than the bulk of the refugees and hosts who lack access to extra-local socioeconomic support systems and have limited social capital linked to others who are in similar socioeconomic conditions.

Our research shows that positive social networks are key sources of resilience for both refugees and host communities. When asked about friendship and spending time with friends, both host and refugee community informants stated that: "without friends, someone to talk to, share food with, to discuss worries, to chew *mira*, smoke, to tell jokes, life in these camps and areas would be unbearable." This space allows for the exchange of ideas, the sharing of concerns, and the building of a larger support network to buffer against economic shocks.

The density, intimacy, and levels of suffering in a protracted refugee setting are unique features of this context, and they have implications for how social capital "works." Refugees and hosts are intimately connected with people in similar or worse states. People are continually absorbing the shocks of those immediately around them, which can wear away at common sources of resilience, through the drain on remittance networks and other social sources of support and inclusion. Although these networks can have a negative impact due to the attrition mentioned above on individual resources and resilience, in shock-prone and highly stressed situations such as protracted encampment, bonding networks, in addition to relief, is often the only pathway to survival. Hence, it is important to note that **social capital and access to formal and informal financial systems are strongly embedded in each other and can/should not be delinked.** In both Turkana and Garissa, access to capital, property ownership, and labor markets is often determined along social, kinship, and friendship ties. The programming implications are that any programming targeting enhanced social cohesion will positively affect informal access to credit/capital and formal financial inclusion.

Policy Recommendations

In order to achieve real, positive, and enduring impact for refugees and host communities, governments and funding agencies must address the presented challenges in locally feasible and culturally and politically realistic interventions. As such, six core recommendations were developed for governments and funding agencies to align their resources better to promote refugee self-sufficiency alongside host community development.

Recommendation #1: All interventions should include a counseling and mentoring component that provides clinical and psychosocial support to program beneficiaries.

It is highly likely that a large majority of the beneficiaries suffer from PTSD, CPTSD, depression, and/or anxiety, as well as compromised immune and cardiovascular systems, high inflammation, and chronic fatigue caused by shocks/stressors as well as chronic sleep deprivation. People suffering from such conditions tend to have lower abilities to engage and follow through sufficiently with interventions such as training programs and have difficulty in navigating the social networks and relationships required for self-sufficient lives. We recommend that:

- Proven therapeutic and mentoring techniques need to be front and center in all development programming and interventions. There needs to be a particular focus on enhancing healthy sleep behaviors as 70% of beneficiaries from both refugee and host communities report unhealthy and inadequate sleeping patterns. This can be done by involving religious leaders who may suggest or work with experts to suggest culturally appropriate techniques for restful sleep enhancement. While there are psychosocial and mental health support services available in the camps, these resources are usually fragmented, siloed between organizations, dependent on limited funding, and are usually focused on cure/management (individuals showing diagnosable conditions) rather than prevention or mitigation (individuals at risk), thereby excluding the bulk of the at-risk population from services.
- Mentorship from successful local individuals who understand local cultural contexts and political economies to help beneficiaries navigate the new social landscapes that emerge from engagement with development interventions. These individuals would include successful entrepreneurs in manufacturing and production and service industries, who would demonstrate strategies for building friendships, and higher capital social and economic networks through example and instruction. Mentoring and apprenticeship is a common practice among the local entrepreneurial communities and can be utilized for development purposes.
- External stakeholders investing in Turkana and Garissa should invest in research conducted by multi-disciplinary teams that have expertise in such intersectional research to understand the local

and contextual particularity of the forms, degrees, and interdependence of psychological needs, local cultural realities, and political economics. Such teams should also understand the importance of social support as a source of resilience and as stress mitigator among refugees and hosts, and how these factors would affect programmatic outcomes.

Recommendation #2: Funders should invest in programs that specifically aim to strengthen social capital.

One major finding of the study was the role of social networks, including remittance networks, in mitigating worries and impacts of shocks and stressors in both refugee and host communities. Remittances flow through social networks and hence are marks of network support. If remittances that are usually kept for emergencies or basic necessities could be converted into investments, where the remitters and remittees can engage in partnerships, this would enable both host and refugee recipients to invest in agriculture and/or livestock. The partnership and the conditions of investment and return on investment would be managed through cultural models of exchange.

Other recommendations around strengthening social capital are through sharing of foods, culinary styles, and ritual spaces. For example, spending time with friends, the ability to maintain long-term hopes, praying, and faith have emerged as positive factors that mitigate against stressors. Planned activities such as feasting events, joint construction projects, and sporting events offer strong opportunities for strengthening social networks.

Recommendation #3: Shift the promoted job model from middle-class delayed wage/ daily labor to pastoral daily wage/non-daily attendance.

Expanding the number of daily wage jobs in both Turkana and Garissa counties by moving away from the delayed payment model toward the pastoralist daily wage model might deliver more disposable and reliable income to refugees and hosts.

More people with access to disposable income means that pressures on the few who are employed can be distributed across a wider social support network. These jobs are usually provided by local NGOs, relief organizations, and local businesses and account for the bulk of the wage-labor jobs in these counties. Local businesses have employed the pastoralist daily wage model successfully for refugees and hosts in both Turkana and Garissa Counties.

Recommendation #4: USG should invest in small-scale agriculture and livestock programs that target women and youth.

Host communities in both counties emphasized the importance of livestock and agriculture in their lives. Refugees in both counties also stressed their desire to use their skills in livestock management and small-scale agriculture to build sustainable lives for themselves during their stay in the camps. While programs guided by the concept of intensive agriculture for markets face significant environmental limitations (water shortage, land quality), investment in incremental growth, with the gradual addition of technologies for water harvesting and increasing crop yields, have strong potential. Given that the cultural restrictions against agriculture within the pastoralist communities apply primarily to men, a long-term focus on pastoralist women who have traditionally practiced agriculture partnered with refugee women and men from agricultural/agro-pastoralist societies and training of young boys and girls would be locally feasible, culturally appropriate, and could enhance general food production and nutritional security. Remittances could be reworked through dialogue into kin-based investment in such activities, thereby reversing the unidirectional flow of resources from the remitter to the recipient.

Recommendation #5: USG should include appropriate feeding of participants as a cross-cutting issue that is embedded within all programs.

Interviews with key informants and refugee host community members revealed that livelihood and other programs that require daily attendance, as well as more than a few hours of attention, usually face attrition due to lack of food and transportation. For programs that do offer food to beneficiaries, the meal provided typically consists of high carbohydrate foods—such as baked goods, tea, and/or soft drinks—that have been shown to negatively affect energy levels, attention spans, and engagement ability. We suggest a shift to low-cost alternatives that could provide beneficiaries with much-needed sources of protein that boost their energy levels, attention span, and engagement ability. While cash payments offer an alternative modality, the importance of feeding program participants is to provide the nutritional energy required to engage with their program and to facilitate the knowledge/information transfer from the trainers to the beneficiaries. ∎

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The Research Technical Assistance Center (RTAC) is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under the terms of contract no. 7200AA18C00057. This policy brief, produced by the Pulte Institute for Global Development at the University of Notre Dame, is the sole responsibility of RTAC and NORC at the University of Chicago, and does not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.