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Original Research

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE UNDERLYING CAUSES OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHALLENGES FACED BY CONGOLESE REFUGEES IN NAIROBI.

¹SYLVIA Wema Toywa and ²RAPHAEL Mwatela

Department of Ethics and Governance, School of Social Science Mount Kenya University

Email: sylviatoywa@gmail.com and R.mwatela@mku.ac.ke

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the underlying causes of socio-economic challenges faced by Congolese Refugees in Nairobi. The research uses a qualitative approach on focus group discussions, and key informant interviews. This research was conducted in six locations in Nairobi County, Kenya; Zimmerman, Kayole, Kasarani, Roysambu, Eastleigh, and Umoja. The Nairobi suburbs were sampled on purpose because Congolese refugees and other refugees are rarely seen there. The Congolese was studied as a minority group of refugees because little research has been done on them. This study used stratified random sample and purposive sampling the research diverse subgroups based on gender, age, level of income, occupation from the host community, and refugees. The researcher employed both primary and secondary sources. In primary data, the researcher was using interviews and open group discussions. Multiple regression analysis was adopted to examine data with inferences. The study concluded that Congolese refugees in Nairobi face formidable challenges in accessing suitable housing, including affordability issues, discrimination from landlords, overcrowding in informal settlements, and insecurity of tenure. These housing challenges exacerbate refugees' vulnerability and perpetuate their marginalization in the urban environment. These challenges underscore the urgent need for policies that increase affordable housing options, enforce anti-discrimination laws, and enhance security measures in informal settlements.

Key Words: Socio-economic challenges, Congolese Refugees, Human Security Theory, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Kenya

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has been plagued by persistent conflict and instability, leading to widespread displacement of its population. As a result, many Congolese have sought refuge in neighboring countries, including Kenya (Johnson, 2019). Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya, has become a significant destination for these refugees, providing a semblance of safety but also presenting numerous socio-economic challenges (Williams, 2021). Refugees often face difficulties in accessing basic services such as healthcare, education, and employment opportunities. These challenges are compounded by issues of legal status, language barriers, and cultural differences, which further hinder their ability to integrate into the local community (Johnson, 2019).

Economic challenges are particularly pronounced among Congolese refugees in Nairobi. Many are unable to secure stable employment due to a lack of documentation, recognition of their qualifications, and competition in an already strained job market (Williams, 2021). This situation forces many to rely on informal and often precarious forms of employment, which do not provide sufficient income to meet their basic needs. Consequently, poverty and food insecurity are prevalent issues within this population (Johnson, 2019). Social challenges also play a critical role in the lives of Congolese refugees. Discrimination and xenophobia can lead to social exclusion and marginalization, making it difficult for refugees to establish social networks and support systems (Williams, 2021). Additionally, the trauma and psychological impact of displacement and the experiences that led to their flight from the DRC can have long-lasting effects on their mental health and overall well-being.

This study aims to investigate the underlying causes of the socio-economic challenges faced by Congolese refugees in Nairobi. By examining factors such as access to services, employment opportunities, social integration, and mental health, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the obstacles and needs of this vulnerable population. The findings will contribute to the development of targeted strategies and policies to improve the socio-economic conditions of Congolese refugees and facilitate their successful integration into the host community.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Yamamoto (2020) while exploring the integration challenges faced by refugees, highlighted significant barriers in language proficiency and cultural adaptation, which directly impacted their employment opportunities and social integration within local communities. Despite Japan's efforts to support refugees, the lack of targeted programs for language acquisition and vocational training has left many refugees underemployed and reliant on social services. In Brazil, research conducted by Silva and Costa (2018) revealed that Congolese refugees struggle with legal documentation processes, which in turn affects their access to formal employment and healthcare services. The study points out that despite Brazil's open-door policy for refugees, the bureaucratic hurdles and language barrier (Portuguese) significantly hamper the socioeconomic stability of the refugee population.

Nalwoga and Muyinda (2021) study in Uganda found that refugees in urban centers like Kampala face challenges accessing affordable housing and employment due to local competition and xenophobia. The research highlights that while Uganda's progressive refugee policy allows for freedom of movement and the right to work, the reality on the ground is far more complex, with many refugees facing discrimination and exploitation. Research by van der berg and Ndlovu (2022) underscored the xenophobic violence and systemic barriers that refugee's encounter, which severely restrict their economic participation and personal safety. The study suggests that despite South Africa's robust asylum system, the actual protection and integration of refugees into the economy and society remain inadequate, with many refugees living in constant fear of xenophobic attacks and struggling to find stable employment.

Within Kenya, studies by Omondi and Kimani (2019) in Nairobi have shown that refugees face numerous socioeconomic challenges, including limited access to the job market due to local competition and regulatory barriers. The research indicates that even with Kenya's relatively

hospitable environment for refugees, the lack of specific integration policies leads to economic marginalization and social isolation for many refugees. Further research by Chege and Wanjiku (2018) in Nairobi highlighted the plight of refugee women, who face heightened vulnerabilities, including gender-based violence and economic exploitation. The study calls for more gender-sensitive interventions to address the unique challenges faced by female refugees in urban settings. Study by Otieno and Patel (2022) traced the socioeconomic integration of refugees over a decade in Nairobi, revealing slow but positive trends in educational attainment and business ownership among the refugee community. However, the study emphasizes that significant barriers remain, particularly in terms of legal rights and social acceptance, which continue to hinder the full potential of Congolese refugees in contributing to Kenya's socioeconomic fabric.

These studies highlight the multifaceted and context-specific challenges faced by refugees across the globe and within Africa, underscoring the need for targeted policies and interventions to facilitate their integration and socioeconomic stability.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK; HUMAN SECURITY THEORY

According to this theory defending the rights of refugees is a critical component of international security (Haq, 1994). The theory was first advanced by Mahbub Ul Haq in the United Nations Development Programme's 1994 Human Development Report, where he emphasizes the need for states to provide safe and secure environments for refugees, as well as for refugees to have access to stable and sustainable livelihoods, thereby supporting the host state's social and economic development. In contrast to the unilateralism of nations and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in bringing about change in the international refugee regime, this study proposes a dialogic model. The proposed dialogue was ongoing and institutionalized among states, civil society, and UNHCR, as well as concerned NGOs and governments (Betts & Loescher, 2016). It was conducted by the ideals of deliberative democracy, which allow excellent arguments to triumph. It does not, however, rule out the prospect of compromise, but rather demands that compromise solutions enhance the common interests of the world community. The dialogic approach is regarded to be capable of halting the relentless expropriation of protection concepts.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is the fundamental text of the human rights movement, guarantees the right to freedom of movement (United Nations, 1948). Unrestricted mobility is a fundamental need in life. It is evident why. The beginning of a liberated existence is predicated upon unrestricted mobility. An individual's opportunities expand when they have the freedom to live without constraints. An individual's life, freedom, and overall welfare are contingent upon their geographical placement. Free movement, as a basic right, acknowledges the timeless pursuit of humans throughout for an improved quality of life. One might argue that the limitations on the rights of free movement established in the twentieth century should not be regarded as the standard. They deviate from what has traditionally been regarded as the standard in human society.

Human Security Theory, as proposed by Haq (1994), posits that safeguarding the rights of refugees is essential for international security. This theory emphasizes the need for states to ensure secure environments and sustainable livelihoods for refugees, thereby supporting both their well-being and the social and economic development of host states. Betts and Loescher (2016) advocate for a dialogic approach to address refugee issues, involving states, civil society, UNHCR, NGOs,

and governments. This approach, based on deliberative democracy principles, aims to reach compromise solutions that benefit the global community. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, guaranteeing freedom of movement, underscores the importance of unrestricted mobility in enhancing individuals' opportunities and overall welfare. The research proposes legalizing unrestricted mobility rights, particularly for work and permanent residence, to promote international order and rational policy formulation. However, challenges remain, such as the lack of a clear definition for human security and the need to balance governmental interests with human rights objectives. Despite these challenges, human security theory offers a people-centered approach that addresses refugee difficulties through protection and empowerment policies, striving for long-term solutions.

This research suggests that there is a strong argument for allowing unrestricted mobility rights to be legalized in order to maintain international order in the modern day. This might be limited to the ability to work and thereafter establish permanent residence. Implementing this action would be a significant stride in formulating rational policy. An effective migration strategy would eradicate inefficiency, support the development of both developing and developed communities, and be advantageous for both voluntary migrants and involuntary refugees. The lack of a clear definition is cited as a major impediment to the idea of human security's efficacy. Human security's people-centered approach is conceptually enticing for refugees and other non-citizens, regardless of commitment or allegiance to the State.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research used a qualitative approach using focus group discussions, and key informant interviews. The researcher will analyze the themes raised after the research is completed. This will greatly assist in acquiring information on ways of ensuring that the socio-economic impact of Congolese refugees in the City of Nairobi is well brought out. (Brown & Jones, 2019). This approach facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and contributions of Congolese refugees in Nairobi's social and economic landscape.

Location of the study

This research was conducted in six locations in Nairobi County; Kenya. Zimmerman, Kayole, Kasarani, Roysambu, Eastleigh, and Umoja. The Nairobi suburbs was sampled on purpose because Congolese refugees and other refugees are rarely seen there. The Congolese was studied as a minority group of refugees because little research has been done on them.

Target population

In Kothari's (2005) study, a target population is defined as the whole collection of persons, events, or themes that an investor aims to draw conclusions about, whether they are real or imaginary. In qualitative research, the concept of sampling relies on the researcher's judgment to accurately characterize a phenomenon. The Congolese living in six regions, which would represent all 17 Sub-Counties of Nairobi, is the researcher's target audience.

Interviewees and focus group discussion include both refugees and members of the host community, such as community elders and business owners. To get the required representation from diverse subgroups in the Nairobi County population, respondents were recruited using stratified random selection. The study focuses on Congolese refugees numbering around 4,000, members of the host community comprising approximately 2,000 individuals, and diverse subgroups totaling about 1,418 residents (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 2023).

It aims to understand the experiences of Congolese refugees regarding housing, employment, healthcare, and education, while also exploring the perspectives of the host community and the diverse demographic groups within Nairobi County. Through this comprehensive approach, the study seeks to inform targeted interventions and policy initiatives aimed at enhancing the well-being of all residents in Nairobi.

Table 1: Target population

Description	Target population
Congolese Refugees in Nairobi	4,000
Members of the Host Community	2,000
Diverse Subgroups in Nairobi County	1,418
Total	7,418

Sampling procedures and techniques

This study used stratified random sample and purposive sampling from respondents from diverse subgroups based on gender, age, level of income, occupation from the host community, and refugees. The researcher utilizes stratified random sampling procedures because it ensures that every member of the population has an equal chance of being included and is ideal for a big population. The study was designed in such a way that stratified sampling covers all of Nairobi, capturing demographic characteristics as well as economic and social-related components. This was performed by identifying the primary components that influenced the research process.

The researcher visited several constituencies and select persons at random to carry out the study to identify Congolese refugees. The researcher will also employ stratified sampling to divide the people into groups and subcategories to guarantee they get the right likelihood of how they affect the city's economy.

Sample Size

The study used Cochran's formula for sample size determination.

Cochran's formula: $n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$

The sample size was for qualitative research methodologies.

The size was among 7,418 people in a similar slice of the Population.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

Where the sample size is the Sample size N is the sample size and is the margin error.

For instance: $n = \frac{7,418}{1 + 74,180(0.1)^2}$

$e = 10\%$ (0.1%); the study sample size is studied.

$$n = \frac{7,418}{1 + 74,180(0.1)^2}$$

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Table 2: Sample Size

Description	Target population	Sample Size
Congolese Refugees in Nairobi	40,00	28
Members of the Host Community	2000	14
Diverse Subgroups in Nairobi County	1418	8
Total	7,418	50

Table 2 illustrates the sample sizes derived for the study's target populations in Nairobi, Kenya. The table delineates the estimated target populations, including Congolese refugees residing in Nairobi (40,000), members of the host community (20,000), and diverse subgroups within Nairobi County (14,180). Calculations based on a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error result in corresponding sample sizes of 28 for Congolese refugees, 14 for members of the host community, and 8 for diverse subgroups.

Data collection methods and procedures

For data collection, the researcher employed both primary and secondary sources. In primary data, the researcher used interviews and open group discussions exclusively. Focus groups because it allows more in-depth responses and takes place face to face. A focus group is a small group of selected participants who contribute to open discussions for research. The choice of interviews as the primary data collection method is motivated by its ability to yield rich and detailed qualitative data directly from participants. It allows for a deeper understanding of their experiences, attitudes, and opinions related to the research topic. Moreover, the anonymity feature created a conducive environment for respondents to openly share their views on the research issue, ensuring efficient and economical reach to the target participants.

Data Analysis techniques and procedures

To make it simpler to enter data into the computer for analysis, it was coded. Microsoft Excel was used to evaluate the data in order to provide statistics in descriptive forms such occurrence rates, percentages, means, modes, and standard deviation. The choice of excel software for analysis is due to the easier and well tabulated figure produced. The threshold for content analysis is thus determined in light of the respondents' responses in relation to the study's objectives. Multiple regression analysis was adopted to examine data with inferences. Multiple regression analysis is used to ascertain the relationship involving the variables.

FINDINGS

Responds Rate

The researcher targeted 50 respondents, 48 (96%) of the respondents participated whereas 4 (6. %) of them did not participate, therefore the study had a respondent rate of 96 %.

Causes of socio-economic challenges faced by Congolese refugees

While the respondents were asked to describe the main economic challenges, they encountered since arriving in Nairobi, Kenya, most of them indicated difficulty in securing stable employment as a predominant issue. Many noted that the job market is highly competitive and that their

qualifications and skills often go unrecognized. Additionally, language barriers and the lack of proper documentation were frequently cited as significant obstacles. High living costs, particularly for housing and food, were also mentioned as major challenges, making it difficult for refugees to make ends meet. The inability to access financial services such as bank loans or credit further exacerbated their economic struggles.

"Finding stable employment in Nairobi has been incredibly challenging for me. Despite having relevant skills and experience, I often face discrimination from employers who prefer to hire locals. The lack of recognition of my qualifications from my home country adds to the difficulty, and navigating the bureaucratic process of obtaining work permits is daunting."(25-years old Man)

When asked how their financial situation has changed since becoming a refugee in Nairobi, the majority of respondents reported a drastic reduction in their household income, leading to increased financial insecurity. Many indicated that previously they were engaged in stable employment or business ventures in their home country, but now they find themselves in precarious economic conditions. The transition to refugee status often resulted in a loss of savings and assets, further compounding their financial difficulties. Several respondents mentioned relying on sporadic, low-paying jobs or humanitarian aid to survive, which was a stark contrast to their previous financial stability. In response to questions about specific employment-related challenges faced in Nairobi, many refugees pointed out that they face significant discrimination in the job market, with employers often preferring to hire locals over refugees. The lack of recognition of their qualifications and professional experiences from their home country was another major issue. Additionally, some respondents reported exploitative working conditions and unfair labor practices, such as being underpaid or overworked. The absence of work permits and the bureaucratic hurdles involved in obtaining them also hindered their ability to secure formal employment.

"The housing situation in Nairobi is dire for many Congolese refugees. Rent prices are exorbitant, making it nearly impossible to afford decent accommodation. Landlords often discriminate against us because of our refugee status, and some even exploit us by charging higher rents or refusing to maintain the property. Many of us are forced to live in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions, which takes a toll on our well-being."(47-years old woman)

When asked about the key factors affecting their access to basic necessities such as food and shelter in Nairobi, several respondents identified economic instability as the primary barrier, with limited income making it challenging to afford rent and adequate food. High rent prices in Nairobi mean that many refugees live in overcrowded or substandard housing conditions. Moreover, the lack of social support networks, which locals often rely on, leaves refugees more vulnerable. Some respondents also mentioned that access to food and shelter is further complicated by discriminatory practices from landlords and service providers who are hesitant to engage with refugees.

Respondents were also asked if they had experienced discrimination or unfair treatment in economic activities in Nairobi. Many noted instances of discrimination and unfair treatment, reporting that employers and service providers often treated them unfairly compared to locals. This included being passed over for jobs, receiving lower wages, and encountering bias in the rental

housing market. Such discrimination exacerbates their already challenging economic conditions and limits their opportunities for financial stability and integration into the local economy.

"Accessing healthcare services in Nairobi has been a struggle for me and many other refugees. Affordability is a major barrier, as we often cannot afford the cost of medical treatment or medication. Language barriers also make it difficult to communicate with healthcare providers, and some of us have experienced discrimination or stigma when seeking medical care. Additionally, navigating the complex healthcare system is overwhelming, and we often don't know where to turn for help."(25-years old Man)

When asked to describe their experiences regarding access to employment opportunities in Nairobi, respondents highlighted various challenges they encountered. Many expressed frustration over the limited availability of job openings that match their qualifications and skills. Discrimination in the workplace was a recurring theme, with refugees often facing prejudice and bias from employers. Additionally, bureaucratic hurdles, such as the requirement for work permits, posed significant barriers to accessing formal employment. Some respondents resorted to informal sector activities, such as street vending, as a means of generating income, despite the associated risks and instability.

Respondents were asked about the main challenges they encountered in finding suitable housing within Nairobi. The most commonly mentioned issue was the exorbitant rental prices, which made it difficult for refugees to afford decent accommodation. Many refugees reported facing discrimination from landlords who were reluctant to rent to them due to their refugee status. This led to overcrowding in informal settlements or substandard housing conditions. Lack of access to basic amenities such as clean water and sanitation further compounded the housing challenges faced by Congolese refugees in Nairobi.

"Enrolling my children in schools in Nairobi has been a nightmare. Many schools require legal documentation that we simply don't have, which excludes my children from accessing education. Language barriers also pose challenges, as my children struggle to understand lessons taught in a different language. Discrimination in schools is another issue, with some teachers treating refugee children differently or refusing to admit them altogether."(33-years old woman)

Regarding access to healthcare services since arriving in Nairobi, respondents shared mixed experiences. While some reported relatively good access to healthcare facilities, others encountered significant barriers. Affordability was a major concern, with many refugees unable to afford the cost of medical treatment and medication. Language barriers and cultural differences also posed challenges in accessing appropriate healthcare services. Additionally, some respondents mentioned experiencing discrimination or stigma from healthcare providers, which deterred them from seeking necessary medical care.

In discussing difficulties faced in accessing educational opportunities for themselves or their families, respondents highlighted several challenges. Limited access to quality education was a common concern, with many refugees unable to afford school fees or facing discrimination in schools. Language barriers also hindered their ability to fully participate in educational programs. Lack of documentation and legal status posed additional barriers, preventing some refugee children from enrolling in formal schooling. Moreover, disruptions to education due to displacement and

insecurity in their home country further compounded the challenges faced by Congolese refugee families in Nairobi.

"To address the socio-economic challenges faced by Congolese refugees in Nairobi, we need both individual and systemic interventions. On an individual level, providing access to job training programs and skills development opportunities would empower refugees to secure stable employment. Systemically, there needs to be greater awareness and enforcement of refugee rights, as well as policies in place to combat discrimination in housing, employment, healthcare, and education. Investing in affordable housing, healthcare facilities, and schools that cater to refugees' needs would also make a significant difference in improving our quality of life." (54-years old man)

When asked about the primary factors contributing to the socio-economic challenges faced by Congolese refugees in Nairobi, respondents identified a range of interconnected issues. Discrimination and xenophobia in the job market and housing sector were cited as major barriers to economic integration. Lack of legal status and documentation limited refugees' access to formal employment, education, and healthcare services. Moreover, structural inequalities and systemic barriers perpetuated socio-economic marginalization among Congolese refugees, exacerbating their vulnerability and hindering their ability to rebuild their lives in Nairobi.

Nalwoga and Muyinda's (2021) study emphasizes the broader regional context of urban refugee experiences, reflecting the challenges faced by Congolese refugees in Nairobi regarding access to affordable housing and employment opportunities amidst local competition and xenophobia. These findings underscore the complex interplay of socio-economic dynamics shaping refugees' livelihoods in urban centers across East Africa, highlighting the need for comprehensive approaches to address systemic inequalities and foster inclusive urban development.

CONCLUSIONS

The study concluded that Congolese refugees in Nairobi face formidable challenges in accessing suitable housing, including affordability issues, discrimination from landlords, overcrowding in informal settlements, and insecurity of tenure. These housing challenges exacerbate refugees' vulnerability and perpetuate their marginalization in the urban environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the study conclusions that Congolese refugees in Nairobi face significant hurdles in accessing suitable housing, including discrimination, high rental costs, and insecurity of tenure. These challenges underscore the urgent need for policies that increase affordable housing options, enforce anti-discrimination laws, and enhance security measures in informal settlements.

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