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DETERIORATING CONDITIONS OF HOSTING REFUGEES: A CASE STUDY OF THE DADAAB COMPLEX IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT This study describes the deteriorating conditions of hosting refugees at three camps (Ifo, Hagadera, and Dagahaley, popularly known as the Dadaab complex) that have been hosting refugees in the semi-arid northeastern part of Kenya since 1991. Local people generally perceive refugees in negative terms for various reasons. First, they feel that refugees are more economically advantaged due to the assistance they receive from aid agencies and their ownership of various businesses at the three camps, which enables them to lead better lives. Competition for the scarce resources in the impoverished semi-arid area between the two groups has also fuelled the locals' dislike for the refugees. Socially, hosting fatigue has developed due to the protracted refugee situation at Dadaab, which is compounded by a large refugee population that is commonly associated with public insecurity. I conclude that in order to foster coexistence between the two groups, humanitarian agencies must incorporate locals more in direct aid programs such as provision of food rations, as well as reduce the high numbers of refugees in order to minimize insecurity and support the meager local resources.

Key Words: Aid agencies; Dagahaley; Economic Factors; Ifo; Hagadera; Social Factors; Somali.

INTRODUCTION

The refugee problem has continued to pose a major challenge to the United Nations (UN) since World War II due to the constant escalation in refugee numbers in each passing decade. Consequently, the involvement of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) with refugees is becoming increasingly complex, especially in Africa where the refugee crisis is perhaps the most chronic. While Africans constitute only 12% of the global population, 47.5% of the world's internally displaced persons are found in Africa (Crisp, 2000a). Moreover, 43.9% of all officially registered refugees worldwide were on the African continent by the mid-1990s (UNHCR, 1995).

As the refugee numbers continue to soar, refugee protection principles have increasingly been challenged and undermined around the world. From the 1960s to the 1980s, for instance, refugees in Africa were treated in a better way than in the period after 1990, when most African countries began to have a preference for repatriation at the earliest opportunity, regardless of the situations in the countries of origin (Rutinwa, 1999). Furthermore, tension and conflict between refugees and local residents has continued to be on the rise (Crisp, 2000a). Thus, one of the greatest challenges facing the UNHCR today is sensitizing local populations to the plight of refugees.

Various studies have attempted to investigate impacts of refugees or other displaced people on hosts in different contexts (Cernea, 2000; de Waal, 1988; Harrell-Bond, 1986; Kuhlman, 1991; Landau, 2004; Salem-Murdock, 1989; Whitaker 2002). In this paper, I build on these studies and describe the factors that have influenced the rapid decline of the asylum institution at three closely situated camps in the northeastern part of Kenya.

Kenya has experienced a huge influx of refugees from the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa due to the relative peace and stability it has enjoyed since it attained independence. However, only four of the original 17 refugee camps that UNHCR had established in Kenya in the early 1990s remain operational: the Kakuma camp in the Turkana District of northwestern Kenya and the three camps at Dadaab in the Garissa District (Ifo, Dagahaley, and Hagadera, commonly referred to as the Dadaab complex). This is mainly due to the government's opposition to the refugee presence in Kenya, coupled with the increasingly negative perceptions toward refugees by the local hosting communities. These camps are located in semi-arid areas in northern Kenya and, as of early 2007, hosted over 241,000 refugees. Kakuma, with a majority of refugees from Sudan, was set up in 1992 (Ohta, 2005) and had a population of 69,400 by April 2007, according to a senior UNHCR official at the Nairobi branch office. Ifo was set up in 1991, and Hagadera and Dagahaley were established in 1992.

Competition for meager resources in the impoverished semi-arid camp areas has contributed to the negative local attitudes toward the refugees (UNHCR, 2001a). Competition in business between refugees and locals, which reportedly led to the closure of the Thika Reception Centre for refugees in 1995 and the Jomvu camp at Mombasa (Verdirame, 1999; Crisp, 2000b), also negatively influences the local-refugee relationship at Dadaab. Despite the fact that 97% of the refugees at the Dadaab complex are from Somalia (UNHCR, 2001b) and have ethnic affinities with, for example, the Kenyan Somali, the similarities between them have not always been reflected in good commercial relations (Montclos & Kagwanja, 2000).

Socially, the refugees at the Kenyan camps greatly outnumber the local population. The Dadaab complex had a population of 171,957 refugees by January 2007, consisting of 70,965 refugees at Hagadera, 60,386 at Ifo, and 40,606 at Dagahaley (figures provided by the UNHCR Branch office in Nairobi). This population has continued to rise from the original 32,421 at Ifo in 1991 and 38,123 and 41,245 at Dagahaley and Hagadera in 1992, respectively (UNHCR, 1994), due to the long-drawn out civil war in Somalia. For example, in June 2006, the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) militia (a loose group of both moderate and extreme Islamists) defeated various warlords of Somalia and took control of Mogadishu, but was in turn overthrown by Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG) forces backed by Ethiopian troops in December 2006 after a 2-week battle. This infighting led to an influx of about 34,000 refugees across the Kenya-Somalia border in 2006 alone (figures provided by the UNHCR Branch office in Nairobi). This rise in refugee population occurred

despite repatriation efforts of small numbers of refugees from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, who also reside at the Dadaab complex. Given a local population of around 15,000 (Ikanda, 2004), the refugee numbers are more than ten times larger than those of their hosts at Dadaab. The government and hosting communities commonly blame this huge refugee presence for the rampant insecurity in northern Kenya (UNHCR, 2001b).

Compared to Dadaab, the refugee population at Kakuma has started to decrease due to voluntary repatriation of the Sudanese refugees following the signing of a peace deal in January 2005 between the Sudanese Peoples' Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) and the Sudanese government, who had previously engaged in a lengthy civil war that largely accounted for the current Sudanese refugee problem. Between December 2005 and April 2007, a total of 4,613 Sudanese refugees have voluntarily been repatriated from Kakuma (figures provided by the UNHCR Nairobi branch office).

Hosting fatigue due to the protracted situation of hosting refugees for over 15 years is also evident at Dadaab. In addition, Garissa has poor infrastructure due to the government's neglect of the area. It is one of the poorest districts in Kenya, with absolute poverty standing at 68% (Republic of Kenya, 2002). Therefore, the poverty inherent around the camps has led the locals to perceive the refugees as enjoying higher standards of living due to the food aid and social services that are provided to them by aid agencies.

However, the presence of refugees has led to improvements in infrastructure in these otherwise remote semi-arid areas. The local population buys foodstuffs from the refugee rations at a cheap price and has access to health care and education due to the presence of the humanitarian agencies. As a result, some researchers have argued that the refugee advantages outweigh their disadvantages (cf. Jamal, 2000).

Here I describe the local-refugee relationship at the three refugee camps around Dadaab in relation to the above factors. The local Somali⁽¹⁾ who inhabit the area around the camps and the refugees from Somalia share the same language and religion due to their ethnic affinities. The Somali (refugees and their hosts) are a patrilineal group who are divided into clans, sub-clans, and lineages. Inter-clan rivalries among Somali refugees (which have been blamed for causing civil war in Somalia), locals themselves, and between the former and the latter have also contributed to the declining hosting conditions at the Dadaab complex. The aim of this study was to document the impacts of a protracted hosting situation of a huge refugee population on an economically marginalized area and subsequently provide evidence to support the implementation of relevant interventions to improve the refugee-host relations in Kenya and beyond.

METHODOLOGY

I. Outline of the Dadaab Refugee Camp

The Dadaab complex is located in the Garissa District of northeastern Kenya. The three camps at Dadaab are located within a radius of approximately 13 km from the Dadaab market (Republic of Kenya, 2002), which is centrally placed. Due to semi-arid conditions that are unfavorable for agriculture and the lack of both infrastructure and major development initiatives, the local people are generally nomadic pastoralists.

The refugee population comprises 35% of the district total (Republic of Kenya, 2001). Despite being a semi-arid area, Garissa has 385,500 ha of shrub bushes, of which 113,140 ha have been destroyed to meet the firewood and construction needs of both refugees and locals (Republic of Kenya, 2002). According to the 1999 census, the district had a population of 392,510 local inhabitants.

II. Study Design and Data Collection Methods

This study was conducted among the local Somali who resided in the immediate vicinity of Ifo, Dagahaley, and Hagadera between November 2002 and April 2003. Refugee leaders and agency officials were also interviewed as key informants. I also made shorter visits to the study site between 2004 and 2006 to verify newly emerging information. Having lived side by side with refugees for over a decade, the respondents were generally conversant with the local-refugee relationship and the typical hosting circumstances at the Dadaab complex. They gave verbal informed consent for participating in the study.

This was a cross-sectional study aimed at generating qualitative and quantitative data. A semi-structured questionnaire was administered to 150 locals (50 in the immediate vicinity of each camp), who were purposively sampled. The nomadic nature of the population generally discouraged random sampling. Two trained locals, fluent in the Somali language, assisted me in conducting these interviews and making translations. This was necessary because some respondents did not understand Swahili, which I spoke in the field. Therefore, both Swahili and Somali languages were used in collecting data for the study.

Qualitative data were derived from key informant interviews and one focus group discussion (FGD) conducted in Swahili. Key informant interviews were conducted on a sub-sample of 20 informants who had extensive knowledge on how refugees have been relating with their hosts since they were first settled around Dadaab in 1991. These included seven local leaders (two village elders, three chiefs, a district officer, and a liaison government officer), seven agency officials (distributed between UNHCR and its various implementing partners), and six refugee leaders (one block leader and one sectional leader from each of the three camps). One FGD of male opinion leaders was conducted to probe the issues that had emerged during the structured interviews. I moderated the

FGD, which was tape-recorded before being transcribed. Observations of various public events and interactions between refugees and their hosts, together with informal discussions with security agents, refugees, and local residents, also contributed to the findings.

RESULTS

I. Economic Factors Shaping Local Attitudes Toward Refugees

More than half of the respondents (n=81; representing 54.0%) perceived refugees to be better off economically compared to themselves, while only 69 (46.0%) of the respondents thought they were better off economically than the refugees.

Thirty-five (43.2%) of respondents who viewed refugees as being better off economically than locals thought this situation was a result of assistance in the form of food rations and other “free things” that refugees receive from humanitarian agencies. Twenty others (24.7%) attributed the situation to the fact that refugees are more enterprising in business and work harder than the locals. A further 16 (19.8%) attributed the better economic status of refugees to the “dollars” that are remitted to them monthly by their relatives who have been considered for third country resettlement in rich Western countries. This money is usually transferred to refugee traders through Somali companies called *hawilad* (Montclos & Kagwanja, 2000). The association of asylum with “dollars” in rich Western countries has stimulated “*buufis*” (i.e., the extreme hope to go for resettlement; Horst, 2001: 3) among both the refugees and the locals. This has led some locals to register as refugees in the hope of being considered for resettlement. Locals also register as refugees in the hope of obtaining food rations and social services from the agencies (UNHCR, 2001a).

The locals’ desire to acquire refugee status is mainly due to the general poverty of the refugee camp areas, which, according to the results of this study, has forced some to subsist on less than \$0.50 US per day. This is reflected in the respondents’ monthly incomes (Table 1); most (24.0%) said they were earning between 5,001 and 7,000 Kenya shillings (KS)⁽²⁾ from their economic activities, followed by 23.3% who were earning between 2,001 and 3,000 KS. In addition, 20.0% said they were earning between 3,001 and 5,000 KS, 16.7% earned above 7,001 KS, and 10.7% earned below 1,000 KS, while the remaining 5.3% earned from 1,001 to 2,000 KS per month. The locals at Dadaab are poor in part because of the few economic opportunities available in the marginalized semi-arid area. Persistent droughts that have led to loss of livestock have also contributed to the economic decline of the area (UNHCR, 2001b).

Table 1. Monthly income of locals

Earnings per Month (KS)	Frequency	Percentage
<1,000	16	10.7
1,001-2,000	8	5.3
2,001-3,000	35	23.3
3,001-5,000	30	20.0
5,001-7,000	36	24.0
≥7,001	25	16.7
Total	150	100

Only five (6.2%) of the 81 respondents who viewed refugees as being better off economically than locals said that refugees enjoy a tax-free status that gives them an edge over the locals in business. The remaining five (6.2%) thought that the refugees were better off economically because they had the ability to obtain goods at cheaper prices through “*haramu*” (illegal and improper means) from Somalia. I found that both locals and refugees pay a tax of 20 KS to the Garissa County Council for every animal sold or purchased at the camps, especially at Hagadera, which has the biggest animal and open air markets compared to those of Ifo, Dagahaley, and Dadaab. Refugees do not, therefore, enjoy a tax-free status at Dadaab except for those operating shops, restaurants, and other businesses inside the camps, which might explain the low percentage (6.2%) of the local respondents who cited this as a reason for the better economic position of refugees compared to locals. The conditions at Dadaab seem to be dissimilar to those that existed at the other closed Kenyan camps such as Jomvu in Mombasa, the closure of which was attributed to the unfair business competition between the locals and the refugees due to the tax-free status of the latter (Crisp, 2000b; Verdirame, 1999).

The findings also suggest that refugees are perceived to own more business enterprises than the locals. Of the 150 local respondents, 96 (64.0%) said that refugees had more business enterprises, whereas only 46 (30.7%) were of the opinion that the locals owned more business enterprises than refugees. The remaining eight (5.3%) respondents argued that it depended on the specific group of refugees. The Sudanese are considered by locals to be bad at business, while Somali and Ethiopian refugees are perceived to be better than the locals in business activities.

The business activities that are practiced around Dadaab include trade in animals and animal products such as milk and hides, shops and restaurant businesses, trade in *miraa* (small leaves that are chewed as a drug or mild stimulant, also known as *khat*), selling new and second-hand clothes and shoes, and selling electronic goods such as radios and cameras. Refugees dominate almost all of the above businesses except for the selling of milk and firewood, in which local businesses have the upper hand due to the fact that refugees have no free access to the vast bush resources around the camps where firewood and pasture for livestock are found. This is because refugees are officially not allowed to keep livestock, although many own goats whose pasture requirements are not as demanding as those of cattle or camels, which

are the main milk-producing animals in the area. Kenyan and agency officials usually turn a blind eye on the refugee ownership of livestock, although the refugee leaders stated that many locals are opposed to it and usually retaliate by confiscating the refugees' goats or physically harming those looking after the animals or collecting firewood. Therefore, many refugees do not own cattle or camels except for a few who are engaged in livestock trade at the camps. Locals also dominate the *miraa* business because refugees are not allowed to freely travel to Kenyan regions outside Garissa where *miraa* is cultivated, due to the government's policy of confining refugees in the camps.

There are more business activities in the areas adjacent to the camps than at the Dadaab market due to the presence of cheap food rations that attract many locals to the camps. Because of the large volume of human traffic at the camps (consisting of both refugees and locals), many business activities that were previously carried out in Dadaab have now been transferred to the camps and the areas surrounding the camps, where market forces of supply and demand are in play. This means that locals who wish to purchase goods at lower prices must travel more than 10 km (from Dadaab, which is centrally located near the camps), which also appears to be creating tension between the two groups. The transfer of the animal market from Dadaab to the area adjacent to Hagadera, for instance, seems to have created dissatisfaction among local pastoralists. This is well captured in the sentiments of a local chief, a key informant, who argued, "The locals are currently refugees since they have to get everything, including the animals that traditionally belong to them, from the camps where refugees have become owners." There have also been numerous quarrels over access to the slaughterhouses in the camps between refugees and their hosts (Montclos & Kagwanja, 2000).

Interestingly, the results also show that most local people (n=99; 66.0% of respondents) at Dadaab are not opposed to refugees running business enterprises in their area. Only 35 (23.3%) of the respondents argued against allowing refugees to freely engage in business due to their refugee status, while the remaining 16 (10.7%) were undecided.

Most respondents who supported the refugee engagement in trade (n=42; 42.4%) argued that refugees participate in business out of necessity since they receive inadequate food rations. An additional 24 (24.2%) supported the refugee engagement in trade on the grounds that both refugees and locals are human beings who ought to be treated equally. Twenty others (20.2%) noted that the refugee presence had boosted the local economy and had led to a reduction in prices of goods and foodstuffs. This is because many refugees sell part of their food rations cheaply to the locals to buy clothes, shoes, milk, and other items that they lack. The remaining 13 (13.1%) of those in support of the idea that refugees should be allowed to own business enterprises opined that excluding refugees from business would lead them to engage in illegal activities, which would worsen the insecurity problem in the area.

Despite the many disadvantages cited by locals regarding the refugee presence, economic advantages were also acknowledged. Some local key

informants pointed out that the growth of Dadaab as a trading center and a small town, and the improvement in infrastructure, were due to the presence of the refugee camps and the agencies' efforts. Participants in the FGD also agreed that locals have access to cheaper goods and foodstuffs because of the refugee presence, and that some locals had even attained the refugee ration cards that granted them access to free food and social services.

The economic advantages of refugees are also reflected in the fact that many locals regularly visit the camps mainly for economic reasons. Of the 145 (96.7%) respondents who said that they often visit the camps at Dadaab, 50 (34.5%) indicated that they go there to sell or buy goods, while 31 (21.4%) go to work for the agencies or to try to secure such jobs. This demonstrates the importance of the three camps as major economic hubs of the area.

A number of locals even asserted that the refugees had taught them how to do business. One woman, when asked how she had benefited from the refugee presence, remarked: "I never thought that even a woman could engage in business and earn money the way I am doing." Similarly, many locals around Dadaab and the camps are now combining nomadic pastoralism with other economic activities such as engaging in business. This diversification provides locals with an alternative economic mode under circumstances of extreme famine. These reasons have prompted UNHCR to argue that the net impact of refugees upon the regions they inhabit in Kenya is positive.

Generally speaking, however, most locals were of the opinion that the refugee presence had opened Pandora's box regarding their current economic woes (which cannot be objectively true, as the area has always been marginalized, even long before refugees were settled there), and were hopeful that the repatriation of the refugees would come sooner rather than later.

II. Conflicts Arising Due to Competition for Scarce Resources

Most locals (n=105; 70.0% of respondents) said that they were opposed to the idea of refugees being allowed to rear livestock at Dadaab, mainly due to the large refugee herds that have been competing with the locals' livestock for pastures and the few water sources. Only 32 respondents (21.3%) assented to the idea that refugees should be allowed to raise livestock. The remaining 13 (8.7%) were undecided. The use of water sources and grazing fields are therefore a source of conflict that has significantly strained relations between the two groups due to the importance of livestock for the local pastoral nomads at Dadaab.

According to a senior official at CARE International (a Canadian organization that is the main implementing agency for the UNHCR) in Kenya, each refugee household owns an average of four goats. He said that although this was against the official policy, it seems inevitable since refugees direly need the goats' milk. However, the refugees usually graze their livestock under common paid herders who are more familiar with the local terrain for ensuring the security of the animals, as they would easily be stolen by bandits if each

refugee household were to take care of its animals in isolation. This swells the refugee herds and arouses jealousy from locals who perceive refugees as having more animals, hence their opposition to the refugee ownership of livestock at Dadaab.

Both refugees and locals also use trees from the vast bushes in the area for construction and firewood needs. Although refugees are not prohibited from collecting firewood outside the camps, locals are entirely opposed to allowing refugees access to the bush resources, and usually employ various means of keeping refugees out of the bush. The refugee leaders who were interviewed as key informants stated that refugees fear going into the bush to look for firewood because locals assault them and confiscate the firewood or sometimes even rape women refugees in the bush. Most local informants, however, attributed the rape incidents to the *shifita*, i.e., the Somali bandit groups that are widely perceived by both locals and the Kenyan government to reside in and around the vast shrub areas in Northeastern Province, but argued very emotionally against allowing refugees to use “their trees” for free. This is mainly due to the lucrative contracts of supplying firewood to the camps that are awarded to the locals by the agencies.

UNHCR started a firewood project in which contracts are awarded (mostly to local bidders) to supply firewood to the three camps at Dadaab in a bid to reduce rape cases and firewood-related conflicts between refugees and their hosts (UNHCR, 2001b). Although the firewood supplied is inadequate to cater to all refugees’ needs, poorer locals meet the shortfall by selling firewood directly to the refugees at around 5 KS for every piece of firewood. Therefore, locals are vehemently opposed to allowing refugees to collect firewood from the bush since the firewood business is very profitable. This situation is similar to that at Kakuma, where locals have formed an association to enable them to conduct all tendering and bidding of firewood. If UNHCR fails to award the contracts to the locals as it sometimes does, violence usually erupts that sometimes leads to loss of life. For instance, in 2002, two young Turkana⁽³⁾ were shot dead at Kakuma in a firewood row pitting the UNHCR, locals, and refugees against one another (Ikanda, 2004).

The firewood contracts awarded to the locals by the UNHCR at Dadaab has appeased them to some extent, although the key local informants still felt that the big refugee population has continued to aggravate desertification in the area. One FGD discussant argued that the persistent droughts in the area can be attributed to the refugees’ negative environmental impacts, which has led to livestock loss and subsequent impoverishment of the local pastoralists.

The harmful environmental impacts of both refugees and their hosts prompted the *Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit* (GTZ), a German organization that is the UNHCR’s implementing partner on environmental conservation, to initiate forest restoration measures by dividing off and fencing various bush-depleted areas that have regeneration potential. These protected areas are popularly known as “greenbelts.” The largest greenbelt at Dadaab is approximately 6 ha, while the smallest covers an area of about 2 ha. Presently,

most of the green zones around Dadaab are a result of the greenbelt initiative by the GTZ.

However, the greenbelt conservation project, despite its apparent good intentions, has not been well received by many locals, who see it as a far cry from what it was meant to accomplish. This is because the GTZ uses plant material from the bushes in the area to fence the greenbelts. From the local key informants' perspective, it is illogical for the GTZ to cut the very trees that it is purporting to protect for the purpose of fencing off already depleted areas. In addition, some refugees have also fenced off areas that are similar to GTZ greenbelts where they do their own conservation for the purpose of grazing their livestock or selling foliage to fellow refugees and sometimes locals. Some local key informants, in fact, interpreted the project as a scheme to grant refugees exclusive grazing rights in the greenbelts. Therefore, the GTZ greenbelt project does not appear to have significantly changed the local perception that the destruction of their natural resources by the huge refugee population has made them poorer.

As regards land issues, all 150 respondents unanimously agreed that refugees should never be allowed to own land. This must be understood in the light of the nomadic lifestyle of the locals, which entails communal ownership of land. At the moment, however, there seems to be a trend whereby privatization of land is slowly taking root. For instance, the areas occupied by the camps, the greenbelts, and even the business premises at Dadaab market are now private, not public, land. The focus group discussants and the local key informants also alleged that some wealthy refugees bought land at the Dadaab market after obtaining Kenyan identity cards from corrupt Kenyan officials. In addition, a small number of refugees cultivate millet and vegetables around the three camps through simple manual irrigation, which appears to have alarmed the locals into believing that their land is being taken away. Although it is encouraging to make refugees self-reliant through such activities, it must be done with caution due to the nomadic way of life of the locals, whose grazing land is under common usufruct regimes where legal property rights are neither formalized nor individualized.

The locals, whose movements were largely unrestricted before the advent of refugees, are no longer free to move or graze wherever they wish, at least not inside the camps, the greenbelts, or the small agricultural plots owned by refugees. The concept of private ownership that has slowly been introduced among people who did not know about it previously has therefore also generated negative local attitudes toward the refugees at Dadaab.

Although competition for water sources between refugees and their hosts has prompted the agencies to sink water boreholes for both groups, the conflicts between the two groups have not been solved through this process. Therefore, competition for scarce resources continues to be a major contributor of local-refugee conflicts at Dadaab, especially due to the extreme poverty of both the locals and the majority of refugees.

III. Social Factors that Contribute to Negative Attitudes Toward Refugees

Insecurity has been one of the major issues contributing to the negative perception of refugees at Dadaab. Nearly all respondents (n=138, representing 92.0%) attributed the insecurity in their region to the explosion in small arms across the porous Kenya-Somalia border that coincided with the arrival of refugees. They argued that although insecurity had always been a problem in their area prior to the arrival of refugees due to the *shifita* menace, the onset of civil war in Somalia in 1991 worsened the situation. The most common insecurity-related incidences at Dadaab are rape cases, cattle thefts, fights, and murder, which according to a local elder, have contributed to the economic decline of the area. This view reflects similar findings in neighboring Tanzania, where refugee-related insecurity has hindered expansion of agriculture (Landau, 2004).

The Dadaab camps are widely believed to be hide-outs for criminals. The local key informants accused UNHCR of overprotecting refugees even when they know that they commonly commit crimes. They alleged that refugees usually commit crimes such as theft, rape, and murder outside the camps before retreating into the safety of their camps where it is difficult for the police to trace them due to the large refugee population and the protection the refugees receive from the UNHCR, which manages the camps. A local chief, for instance, alleged that camps are safe havens for Somali warlords who have families inside the camps, which they usually come to visit at night after fighting during the day.

Clan rivalries among the local Somali have for a long period also contributed to the problem of insecurity in the larger Garissa District. Although most locals are of the Ogadeni clan, other clans such as the Marehan and Harti are also present in significant numbers. There have been occasional inter-clan clashes among the locals over the use of natural resources. According to the UNHCR (2001b), the Ogadeni inter-clan rivalries that had been in existence before refugees came increased upon the arrival of other clans and sub-clans, who brought a history of inter-clan rivalries from Somalia to the area and the refugee camps. If two clans fight in Somalia or elsewhere in Kenya, tension usually builds up between members of the same clans at refugee camps, and even with locals (UNHCR, 2001b).

The protracted refugee situation at Dadaab also seems to have caused hosting fatigue among the locals, whose leaders constantly call for the repatriation of refugees through the Kenyan media and other forums. For instance, one key informant called for the expulsion of refugees due to what he described as “public fatigue that has been occasioned by their staying here too long.” Another key informant suggested that the locals’ only salvation was to hope for the eventual repatriation of the refugees. As he put it:

“We have been keeping quiet because we know that one day peace will be restored back in their home countries and then they will go. If anyone suggested that they are being settled permanently, all hostilities that we

have been suppressing will explode.”

At Dadaab, all social ills, including what locals perceive to be deterioration in cultural norms, is blamed on refugees. Some practices deemed by the locals to be immoral according to Islam, such as mixed marriages, drinking alcohol, and playing loud music, which are now evident at Dadaab, are associated with the refugee presence. A local chief also said he was opposed to the introduction of churches for non-Muslim refugees and the “scanty” clothing worn by female agency workers and non-Muslim refugee women. Refugees were also blamed for the introduction of the HIV/AIDS pandemic at Dadaab. This idea was particularly dominant in the FGD, where a local village elder argued: “The refugees have polluted our culture and brought AIDS into our midst.” Locals’ association of refugee presence with a breakdown in the traditional structure and increase in HIV/AIDS has also been reported in other hosting situations, such as western Tanzania (Whitaker, 2002).

In examining the social effects of the refugee presence on hosts at the Dadaab complex, it cannot be assumed that the hosts perceive all refugees similarly. As in other contexts (see Whitaker, 2002) the origins of the various refugee populations at Dadaab determine how the locals interact with different refugee groups. The Somali usually view people from other ethnic groups as being inferior to them (Horst, 2003), and despite the inter-clan rivalries, they appear to tolerate Somali refugees better than those from the Sudan and Ethiopia whom they usually treat with open scorn. Somali children (both refugees and locals), for instance, habitually utter a contemptuous “*uf uf*” sound, accompanied by holding their noses with their fingers, whenever a Sudanese refugee is passing by (an offensive suggestion that the Sudanese smell bad) and refer to black non-Somali as people of “*nywele ngumu*” (hard/tough hair). It is also not uncommon to see a Somali wash a water tap that was previously used by a Sudanese refugee before using it inside the camps.

One of the most positive social aspects of the refugee presence is the massive interaction between the two groups. For instance, almost all respondents (n=145, representing 96.7%) noted that they regularly visit the camps; of these, 40 (27.6%) go to visit relatives while 20 (13.8%) go for other socio-cultural reasons such as seeking female genital mutilation services.⁽⁴⁾ There are also significant numbers of intermarriages between locals and Somali refugees, which have been important in minimizing tensions and hostilities between the two groups. Lastly, the locals have also directly and indirectly benefited from social services such as medical care and education provided by the agencies due to the refugee presence. However, the refugee-local relationship at Dadaab appears to be characterized by more negative than positive social factors.

IV. The Role of Aid Agencies in Fueling Conflicts between Refugees and Locals

Most (n=35, 43.2%) of the respondents who argued that refugees are better off economically compared to the locals attributed the situation to being

discriminated against by the aid agencies. According to them, these agencies only assist refugees despite the fact that the locals are just as vulnerable as the refugees, if not more so.

The humanitarian agencies' role as the major agents of development in areas adjacent to the Kenyan refugee camps is critical since the government has largely ignored the locals in these regions. There are ten humanitarian organizations currently working in Dadaab. CARE plays the UNHCR's implementing role while the other organizations such as the GTZ have their own specialized functions. However, much of the agencies' direct aid, such as providing food rations, social services, and third country resettlement to those in extreme danger of being persecuted at the Kenyan camps, is mainly directed towards refugees, while locals only benefit indirectly, e.g., by buying food rations cheaply from refugees. The situation is made worse by the fact that the refugees have not been integrated into local communities and must rely on the agencies for almost all of their needs since most cannot be self-reliant. The locals are therefore filled with envy every time they see the agencies address the basic needs of refugees, such as providing food rations. This was expressed by a focus group discussant, a local chief in his early fifties, who stated:

“The pain we have is that we see all the good things being given to the refugees while we get nothing. We have given these people (refugees) accommodation but we see them eat while we go hungry. We only benefit from the agencies through inhaling the dust created by their vehicles that we shall never ride in.”

In terms of employment, the agencies had only engaged 28 (18.7%) of the respondents, mostly in low cadre jobs such as security guards. Many local respondents (n=53; 35.3%) indicated that they earned their livelihood from small business activities such as selling *miraa*, milk, and hawking other goods, followed by pastoral nomadism (n=32; 21.3%). According to senior officials at the UNHCR and its implementing partners such as CARE, GTZ, and *Médecins-Sans-Frontières* (MSF, also known as Doctors without Borders, a Belgian organization in charge of medical services at the Dadaab complex), nearly all available jobs at the agencies are usually given to incentive workers (volunteers who are paid small amounts of money as incentives), most of whom are refugees due to the UNHCR's policy of building capacity among them. For example, a senior CARE official in charge of educational programs pointed out that of the 400 teachers employed thus far at the three camps, only five were locals while the rest were refugees.

The low educational levels of locals also seem to be working against them in securing agency jobs. For example, 72 (48.0%) of the respondents had no formal education, 25 (16.7%) had attained full or partial secondary school level of education, 21 (14.0%) had completed or partly obtained primary education, 20 (13.3%) had acquired *madrassa* education (basic Islamic knowledge that teaches Muslims how to read and recite the Koran), and only 12 (8.0%) had attained a post-secondary level of education.

According to Montclos and Kagwanja (2000), the locals at Dadaab have previously held demonstrations and organized petitions in support of their case for having more jobs in the camps. This shows the locals' dissatisfaction with the agencies in job allocation matters, in spite of their low educational standards. Given that only 8.8% of the district's population is engaged in wage employment (Republic of Kenya, 2002), this issue is highly sensitive.

The agencies' role in social services delivery appears to have also provoked hostilities between refugees and their hosts. In terms of education, for instance, the three camps at Dadaab had a total of 16 primary schools (six at Hagadera, and five each at Ifo and Dagahaley) and one secondary school for each camp, while the local population in Dadaab and the areas surrounding the camps were served by only one primary and one secondary school. Each camp also had three health centers and a hospital (Montclos & Kagwanja, 2000), as opposed to the vast neighborhood, which had no visible health services. The average distance to a health facility over the entire district is 50 km (Republic of Kenya, 2002). The local informants maintained that they could only access education and health facilities under the guise of being refugees, which has forced a number of them to register as refugees.

Agencies have also caused tensions between refugees and their hosts through their selective maintenance of water boreholes. The scarcity of water in the semi-arid Dadaab region has prompted the agencies to sink some boreholes for the locals in addition to those sunk inside the camps for refugee use (UNHCR has funded the construction of 32 boreholes within a 150 km radius around Dadaab, while CARE has sunk 17 inside the three camps for refugee use, according to a senior official at UNHCR, Nairobi Branch office). These boreholes have been very useful to the local population, but they have not helped to reduce hostilities between refugees and locals. This is because the refugees' boreholes inside the camps are maintained by the agencies, while locals are usually required to maintain their own boreholes. The locals, therefore, pay 2 KS as a maintenance fee for every 20-L container of water they draw, which they complain is expensive. Many locals feel they are "buying water," as they commonly asserted during interviews, instead of helping in the borehole maintenance. Thus, although the sinking of boreholes for the locals was a noble idea, it has made the locals feel discriminated against, which has increased rather than reduced the resentment of refugees by the locals.

Therefore, despite the fact that the agencies have immensely contributed in direct and indirect improvement of the locals' lives, their refugee-centric approach appears to have largely contributed to the negative perceptions toward hosting refugees at Dadaab, since the locals do not seem to dislike refugees per se. This attitude is reflected in the sentiments of a village elder, who stated:

"Our problem here is not with the refugees, but with the NGOs [non-governmental organizations] dealing with refugees as they have completely neglected us even though we gave the refugees the land they are settled on. They exploit us in all forms, yet give nothing in return, so how do you expect us to feel when they assist only refugees?"

At the time I was conducting fieldwork for this study, CARE appeared to have started addressing the locals' concerns. For instance, it had initiated a program to specifically assist locals, known as the Local Assistance Program (LAP), which is the equivalent of the Refugee Assistance Program (RAP) that has been addressing refugee needs. According to the CARE official in charge of the program, the objective of LAP was to improve the living standards of the local people by promoting educational and sanitation standards, providing drinking water by drilling boreholes, helping in marketing local livestock products, and improving food security by promoting micro-irrigation agriculture. Unfortunately, I could not evaluate the impacts of this project, as it was still in its initial stages.

CARE had also begun training the local population in various fields such as animal health and tailoring, and offered basic nursing courses for the traditional birth attendants through a local NGO called Aspect Dadaab. This NGO was registered in 1998 by the local elite with the objective of demanding the locals' incorporation into the assistance programs offered by the agencies. According to a senior official, the NGO has also liaised with the GTZ in creating awareness on environmental degradation and has been lobbying CARE into drilling more boreholes for the local population. The focus group discussants agreed that this NGO represents the best practices for assisting locals.

Perhaps the greatest contribution of the agencies has been their role in improving the infrastructure in the previously neglected camp areas. For instance, a generator supplies electricity to agency officials and some government offices, while the locals who have registered as refugees have access to refugee schools and hospitals. However, inadequate direct aid to the locals has continued the perception of this assistance as but a drop in the sea.

DISCUSSION

Various studies of the refugee-local relationship have suggested that refugees are generally considered more economically vulnerable than their hosts, who usually employ refugees in various capacities (cf. Kibreab, 1985; Whitaker, 2002). I found that more than half of the respondents (n=81; 54.0%) felt that they were worse off economically than the refugees, suggesting that the circumstances at the Dadaab complex may be different. A similar situation is reflected at Kakuma, where some wealthy refugees employed local children as domestic servants while a number of Turkana women hosts engaged in prostitution out of necessity (Montclos & Kagwanja 2000).

The socio-economic neglect of the area by the Kenyan government and its long-standing insecurity problem (due to inhabitants fighting over scarce resources) has its roots in a history of political struggles. The Berlin Treaty of 1885, which partitioned Africa, ignored the ethnic affinities of the various African people, including the Somali, as boundaries were based on European interests. Britain ruled Kenya and northern Somalia, France controlled Djibouti, and Italy occupied southern Somalia. In its endeavor to create a "buffer zone"

with Ethiopia and Italian Somaliland (now Somalia), the British colonial administration redrew administrative boundaries within Kenya, which created the Northern Frontier District (NFD, now Northeastern Province) in 1909. The movement of the Somali people was restricted to the NFD (Hyndman, 1996: 163). No effort was made by the colonial government to either promote social or economic activities in the district or integrate it politically with the rest of Kenya.

The newly independent Kenyan state took up where the colonialists had left in maintaining the economic and social isolation of the Somali people as reflected in the post-independence government's official strategy that stated in part:

“... our problem is to decide how much priority we should give ... less developed provinces. To make the economy ... grow as fast as possible, development money should be invested where it will yield the largest increase in net output. This approach will clearly favor the development of areas having abundant natural resources, good land and rainfall, transport and power facilities and people receptive to and active in development.” (Republic of Kenya, 1965: 46)

This policy served to marginalize the entire northern part of the country where the four remaining refugee camps are currently located. This is due to the fact that successive governments have completely ignored the region in terms of infrastructural development. The systematic discrimination against the Kenyan Somali provoked them to fight for inclusion in greater Somalia at Kenya's independence in 1963, which prompted the government to retaliate by imposing restrictions on commerce and the nomadic movement of these people (UNHCR, 2001b).

This formal neglect and underdevelopment significantly accounts for the economic vulnerability of the locals at Dadaab. However, many locals blamed the aid agencies for their economic problems, since these organizations signified the only signs of development in the area's history. For instance, the local perception that refugees are enjoying more privileges has led a number of them to register as refugees in the hope of acquiring food aid, third country resettlement, and other direct benefits that are currently only available to refugees.

Agency officials interviewed as key informants attributed their refugee-centered approach to the fact that their mandate is to assist refugees, since Kenyans have their own government. This argument appears to contradict the UNHCR's policy of raising standards for both refugees and their hosts if the standards of the latter are unacceptably low (Harrell-Bond, 1986; UNHCR, 1995). In Tanzania, for instance, aid agencies initiated development projects in host communities to compensate locals for the burden of hosting refugees (Whitaker, 2002). Therefore, the agencies need to fully involve hosting communities in direct aid programs at the Kenyan camps, since it is largely through their presence that the local desire for development has been awakened.

Competition for scarce resources plays a major role in determining the refugee-local relationship in many refugee contexts. In most cases, the local impact of refugees does not necessarily become negative until a situation of scarce resources leads to intensified competition between refugees and hosts (de Waal, 1988; Kibreab, 1985; Whitaker, 2002). At Dadaab, such competition has been particularly intense due to the semi-aridity that has resulted in scarce natural resources. This is coupled with the huge refugee population that results in a high refugee-to-local ratio, which contradicts the UNHCR's recommendation that large camps of over 20,000 people should be avoided (UNHCR, 1998). The situation has further been aggravated by the ever-increasing refugee population at the Dadaab complex due to the continuing civil war in Somalia. An incessant expansion of refugee shelters and a parallel displacement process of the locals from their prime grazing land have resulted. Cernea (2000) argued that poverty is intrinsic to displacement whenever there are no corrective measures, which may explain the claims of many locals that the refugee presence had done them more harm than good.

Insecurity is a sensitive issue at Dadaab. According to Crisp (2000b), the problem of violence is epitomized by the Kakuma and Dadaab camps, where incidents involving death and serious injury take place on a daily basis, and outbreaks of violence and unrest occur without warning. Both refugees and locals blame each other for this insecurity. For instance, refugee leaders interviewed as key informants pointed out that the bulk of the bandit group memberships is made up of locals since the area has always been volatile, long before the advent of refugees. *Shifta* are criminal gangs, and it is therefore difficult to prove whether they are refugees or locals. Harrell-Bond (1986) has argued that it is not difficult for host governments to demonstrate that the refugee presence leads to higher rates of crime in situations where refugees are hosted in conditions of extreme poverty, regardless of whether this is true. Similarly, it is difficult to determine whether the insecurity at Dadaab is mainly due to the refugee presence as has been argued by the government and the locals or due to other factors such as those cited by the refugee leaders.

The linkage of terrorist-related activities to the refugee presence has put them in an even more precarious situation at Dadaab. Both the Kenyan and the U.S. governments have long reported that lawless Somalia is a safe haven for suspected al-Qaeda terrorists. Having suffered the consequences of terrorist attacks twice (the 1998 U.S. embassy bombing in Nairobi and the 2002 bombing of the Paradise Hotel in Kikambala), whose suspects are believed to have escaped to Somalia, the Kenyan government appears to link Somali refugees with terrorism and has lately refused to grant asylum to more Somali refugees fleeing the civil war at home. This was clearly demonstrated by the government's closure of its border with Somalia on 3 January 2007, locking out between 4,000 and 7,000 asylum seekers in dire need of humanitarian assistance at the border town of Doble in Somalia, according to various civil society groups in Somalia, out of its concern that terrorists would enter the country disguised as refugees. In brief, there is substantial intolerance toward refugees in Kenya as demonstrated by the fact that all refugee camps are found in the most unproductive parts of the country where refugees have not been integrated into the local economies.

This notwithstanding, both the refugees and their hosts are benefiting from each other's presence. For instance, various key informants told me that some refugees had become Kenyan citizens fraudulently by "buying" Kenyan identity cards from corrupt officials. On the other hand, some locals at Dadaab have also acquired refugee ration cards, which are sold discreetly at the markets set up in the camps for about 2,000 KS (Hyndman, 1996). In fact, a number of Somali from both sides of the border have "dual status" whereby they hold both Kenyan and Somali identifications at once (Hyndman, 1996: 269). This arrangement entitles the locals to food rations and social services provided to the refugees and greater mobility and sometimes the opportunity to work in Kenya for the refugees. Thus, this "grey" economy shows that their continued co-existence is in the best interest of both groups. The refugees should therefore not only be viewed in terms of disadvantages, but also in terms of their relative advantages for local communities (Harrell-Bond, 1986; Whitaker, 2002).

CONCLUSIONS

The study established that the institution of asylum has seriously deteriorated in Kenya due to various factors. Socially, the insecurity associated with the refugees, the general poverty of the locals that makes them perceive refugees as leading better social lives, and the protracted refugee situation that has resulted in hosting fatigue have all contributed to the locals' negative perception of the refugees. Competition for the meager natural resources at Dadaab has also played a key role in influencing the negative local perception of the refugees.

The perception that refugees are better off economically than their hosts also appears to have contributed to the deteriorating attitudes of locals toward refugees. Most sentiments expressed by locals pertaining to the "better" economic status of refugees are actually inaccurate. The reality at Dadaab is that the majority of the refugees are generally poor since only a tiny percentage of refugees are entrepreneurs. This is illustrated by the sentiments of a Somali refugee leader who argued that it is actually the refugees' deprivation that has made their children malnourished and has often forced them to put their lives at risk by venturing into the *shifita*-occupied forests to look for firewood and construction poles. In addition, the fact that some refugees at Dadaab have fraudulently acquired Kenyan identity cards and others are still striving to obtain them clearly demonstrates the fact that the refugees at Dadaab are not satisfied with their status.

Competition in business, although important, appears to be insignificant in shaping local attitudes toward refugees at Dadaab, as most locals (n=99; 66.0%) were not opposed to refugee engagement in trade. This is contrary to other studies (cf. Crisp, 2000b; Verdirame, 1999) that attributed the closure of former refugee camps in Kenya to hostilities between locals and refugees due to competition in business. This appears to be a paradox since locals are not opposed to one of the sources of the refugee wealth (trade), yet they perceive them negatively for allegedly being richer. However, this ambivalence is not surprising,

as the local reason for perceiving refugees negatively as argued by a local elder is the feeling that aid agencies, not the refugees per se, were discriminating against the locals.

Although the agencies have helped in improving local living standards in terms of improving infrastructure, sinking boreholes, and providing social services such as medical care, the hosting community at Dadaab appears to have increasingly felt discriminated against since they are not given food rations and other direct benefits that are currently being enjoyed by refugees. Previous studies, notably by Harrell-Bond (1986), have advocated raising standards for both refugees and their hosts in refugee hosting situations. In addition, the “refugee aid and development” strategy (UNHCR, 1995: 158) also emphasizes the need to develop refugee-populated areas. Therefore, the aid agencies at Dadaab should incorporate locals more into their aid programs, by providing them with occasional food aid, strengthening the LAP and local NGOs such as Aspect Dadaab, and helping to maintain the local boreholes to remove the perception of locals that they are buying water.

In addition, the Kenyan government should meet its responsibility to improve the socio-economic infrastructure of the Northern region where the Kakuma camp and the Dadaab complex are located. The government should also view refugees not only as a problem, but also as an opportunity, since refugees have made a very positive contribution to the local economy in terms of providing a market for local animals, promoting trade, and attracting agency aid. Given the realities of the protracted refugee situation in Kenya, the government should cooperate with the aid agencies to fully integrate refugees in Kenya instead of confining them into camps.

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NOTES

1. The local residents in the Garissa District are of the Somali ethnic group. Since most refugees from Somalia also belong to the Somali ethnic group and the word “Somali”

- may refer to either a nationality or an ethnic group, I use the word “locals” to refer to Kenyan nationals who belong to the Somali ethnic group.
2. The exchange rate for the Kenyan shilling varied between 75 and 80 to \$1 US from November 2002 to April 2003 when the study was being conducted.
 3. The Turkana are a Nilotic ethnic group who are the refugee hosting community at the Kakuma camp in the vast Turkana district in the Rift Valley Province of northern Kenya.
 4. Female genital mutilation is performed as a cultural rite among various Somali groups. It is illegal in Kenya, but some local women secretly take their daughters to undergo the rite inside the camps where they are less likely to be detected due to the weak policing of the huge refugee population.

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