

## **Refugeeism in Kenya: A Social Work Perspective**

**OversonMusopero**

*Department of Public Administration Hanyang University South Korea*

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the state of refugeeism in Kenya from a Social Work Perspective. It maintains that refugeeism can be better understood from a Social Work Perspective that uses a holistic approach from political, economic, social and human rights angles. This paper explores the prominence of refugeeism in Social Work practice. Just like other countries, religion and politics are causing the influx of refugees in Kenya. There are many social, political and economic challenges faced by these refugees and social workers use different strategies of intervention. The paper argued that the place of refugeeism in the societies is not fully understood. Refugees are not recipients of philanthropy, charity or humanitarian aid but they are active recipients with inherent capacity to contribute to national development of their host country if their rights are observed and their potential is unlocked. This paper also recommended a proper Social work intervention as a catalyst of paradigm shift from dependent refugeeism to developmental refugeeism.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Popular interest in refugeeism has experienced a rapid increase in the modern societies. Refugeeism as a social development issue is dated back to the early phases of human habitation on earth. Therefore it is part of both human civilization and development. Several studies including Ayumba and Oudis (2005) have shown that refugeeism is a broad and complex social phenomenon. Globally the primary victims of refugeeism vary from place to place and time to time. According to the International Organisation for Migration (2014) the prevalence of refugees is increasing globally. The current estimate is that 65.3 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide and about 21.3 million are refugees and over 80% of these refugees are hosted by developing countries like Kenya.

Throughout history, famine, political and religious persecution, invasion and wars had resulted in a trail of refugees across the globe. In response the United Nations Assembly established a High Commission for Refugees in 1949 and called the member states government to cooperate with United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHRC). In 1951 the Geneva Convention also provided rights protection and privileges to the refugees. This marked the birth of international laws and regulations on refugeeism worldwide. According to Kibreal (2003) the main thrust of these laws is to promote dignity, equality and the rights of refugees. However, regardless of the existence of these laws there is still a lot to be improved in the refugeeism fraternity. Galaly (2006) noted that refugeeism is viewed as a threat to development that prevents people from developing their potential and limit their ability to contribute positively to the economy and society of the host country. To this effect in many countries refugeeism is regarded as a burden to national economic development. Some policies of the host countries are not friendly enough to make refugees development beings. Rather these policies strip off their inherent development capacity and leave them as dependent beings.

Refugeeism is associated with security and self-identity problems. Grindeim (2013) alluded that refugees are vulnerable to exploitation and extreme insecurity. At the expense of receiving hospitality they are often harassed. The harassment comes from both the local people and the national authorities whose policies have unfavorable sentiments towards refugees. In most cases the local people feel more marginalised than refugees (Kebreab, 2003). In this regard, the refugees who receive international humanitarian aid are not treated well by the local people who perceive them as competitors and grabbers of the privileges that could be channeled to them if these refugees were not existing. When excluded from the privileges, the host population label the refugees and view them as enemies. This hostile relationship usually infringes the security of refugees from the local people especially where there are scarce resources. The protracted refugee situation had also resulted in loss of self-worth and identity. Being a being and being called a refugee has degraded the sense of self-worth and identity among the refugees. Its implication forced the refugees to identify themselves as fenced, weak and handicapped individuals who should suffer from poverty and hunger (Waldron, 2001). Refugeeism is socially excluded, emotionally degraded, politically protracted and economically incapacitated and labelled as

irrelevant in the development discourse. They are viewed as dependent on aid and not willing to work for their self-sustenance (Kumin, 2004).

Drawing from the above background this paper explored the state of refugeeism in Kenya from a Social Work perspective. According to Swift and Timas (2004) there are many religious, political, social and economic causes of refugeeism. The paper sought to identify these causes in the Kenyan context. Sytnik (2012) indicated that the majority of refugees worldwide face a plethora of challenges in refugee camps of the host countries. This paper looked at these challenges from political, religious, social, and economic perspectives. The paper finally revealed the role of social work and its interventions towards refugee crisis. This had showed the need of understanding refugeeism from a Social work perspective because it is holistic in nature. Placing refugeeism at the correct position in the realm of social work practice fosters a sustainable social and human capital development. It also promotes paradigm shift from a traditional dependent refugeeism to a modern developmental refugeeism.

## II. WHAT IS REFUGEEISM

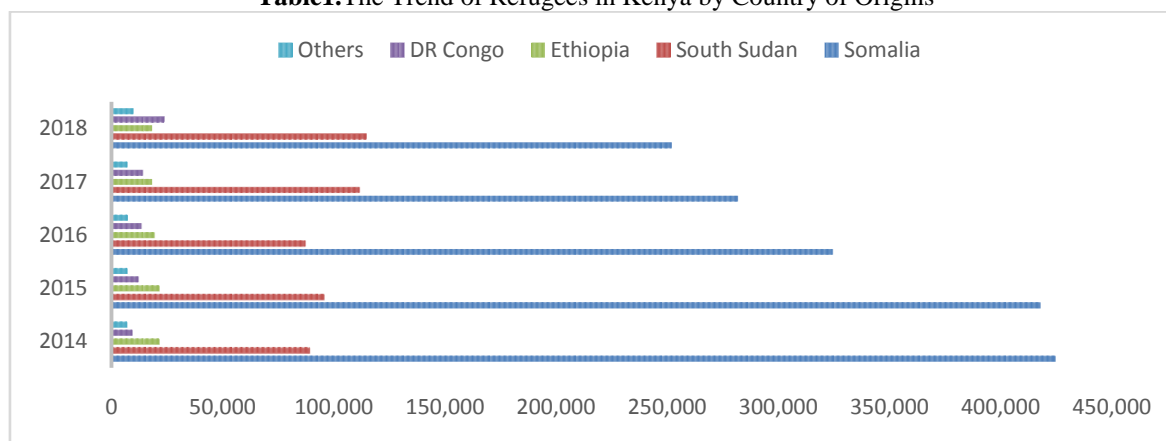
Refugeeism is an elusive concept to define and it is broad in scope. Depending on the circumstances, refugeeism can be defined from a political, economic, social, religious and human rights angles. Refugeeism is an evolving concept. The definition of refugeeism is very important because the way the society defines refugeeism influences the treatment and the value given to the refugees by that particular society. In this regard it is the author's belief that refugeeism should be defined and perceived from a Social Work perspective that is holistic in its definition. According to the Kenya Refugee Act No. 13 of 2006 Section 3 (1) (a) refugeeism is a state of being a refugee thus a refugee was defined as a person owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, sex, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion who is outside the country of his/her nationality and is unable or owing to such fear is unwilling to avail him/herself of the protection of that country. The definition was rooted from a legal or political perspective and it leaves a lot to be desired.

## III. REFUGEEISM IN KENYA

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2009) estimated that Kenya had approximately 357, 635 documented refugees across the country in 2009. According to the Statistical Summary of Refugees and Asylum Seekers Report (2018), the current population of refugees in Kenya is approximately 417, 758. It is indicated that the majority of these refugees arrived during the first half of the 1990s. This was mainly caused by civil conflicts in Somalia and Sudan. The geographic location of Kenya (the horn of Africa) makes it easier for the refugees to enter the country. Kenya has the second highest refugee population in Africa after Ethiopia. The influx of refugees have been perceived in many ways in Kenya (Little, 2004). This section therefore, intent to bring to the fore the refugees trend, causes of refugeeism and the challenges faced by refugees in Kenya.

**(a) Refugees Trend:** -Refugees in Kenya are mainly from Uganda, Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea, Sudan, Burundi, Rwanda and Congo (Kibreal, 2003). The chart below indicates the distribution of refugees in Kenya by country of origin.

**Table1.**The Trend of Refugees in Kenya by Country of Origins



Source: Statistical Summary of Refugees and Asylum Seekers Report(2018)

The above chart shows that in 2018 more than half of the refugees in Kenya came from Somalia (251,972) followed by South Sudan (114,771), Congo (23,494) and Ethiopia (17,912) respectively. Other countries like Uganda, Eritrea and Burundi constitute the remaining 9,609. Although the trend shows that the number of refugees is dropping for the past 4 years, there is no significant change because the rate is very low.

In response to the mass movement of refugees into the country, the Kenyan government established 15 camps to cater for them. Later on in 1988 these camps were consolidated into 4 major camps which currently host about 377,236 refugees (90.3% of all refugees in Kenya). The remaining 40,522 (9.7%) are spread in various parts of the country. The table below illustrates the trend of refugees by location in Kenya.

**Table 2.**The Trend of Refugees in Kenya by Location

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Nairobi	16,150	32,372	33,528	15,821	27,921
Alinjurgur	110,021	109,117	84,230		
Kakuma	134,610	138,911	114,648	137,715	141,986
Daadab	224,546	219,783	174,937	236,553	207,329
Other Places	53,481	53,729	43,756	41,903	40,522
<b>Total</b>	<b>551,352</b>	<b>553,912</b>	<b>451,099</b>	<b>431,992</b>	<b>417,758</b>

Source: Statistical Summary of Refugees and Asylum Seekers Report(2018)

As indicated in the table above, currently Daadab Refugee Camp hosts nearly half of the refugees in Kenya (207,329). Kakuma hosts about 141,986, and Nairobi hosts approximately 27,921. The remaining 40,522 refugees live in various places across Kenya.

**(b) Causes of Refugeeism:** -There are many factors that are causing the influx of refugeeism in Kenya. All these causes emanate from political, religious, economic and social instabilities. In line with the above notion, the common causes of refugeeism in Kenya are wars, civil wars, human rights violations, natural disasters, economic hardships and religious persecutions. The effects of these causes to refugeeism vary from time to time. The causes of refugeeism are interrelated and interconnected. For example there is a strong link between civil wars, human rights violations, hunger and poverty which are push factors of refugees.

According to the United Nations Refugee Agency (2015) wars and civil wars are the main causes of refugeeism. According to their report, a decade ago only 6 people were forced to leave their homes in every minute across the globe. However the average increased four times by 2015 as the rate was at 24 people per minute. This is a clear indication that wars and civil wars have a great effect in the rise of refugeeism. Kibreal (2003) noted that after the fall of military dictatorships in Somalia and Ethiopia, Kenya witnessed a tremendous upsurge of refugeeism. The Somalia refugees are the dominant ethnic group in Kenya. These refugees predominantly belong to the main Somali clans of the Issak, Rahaweyn, Darood and Hawiye. There are also Somali Bantu, Ashraf, Benadir, Bajuni and Barawa from the minority groups who fled to Kenya after the outbreak of civil war in 1991. These civil wars were also coupled by natural disasters like famine and hunger that periodically hit Somalia. In search of greener pastures most of them moved to the nearest Daadab Camp in the northern part of Kenya.

For many years Kenya had been one of the most generous refugee-hosting countries, taking in many victims of economic hardships and religious persecution. An ongoing tension between Christians and Muslims had also contributed to the rise of refugee population in Kenya. In Daadab Camp, the greatest percentage of the refugees are Muslims from Somalia. The remaining percentage are Christians from Ethiopia and Sudan. Although the Muslim minorities did not face much persecution, tension with Christians was reportedly high. To save their lives from these religious tensions and persecutions in their countries both Christians and Muslims especially in the eastern Africa flee and search security as refugees in Kenya. Other than persecution, economic hardship is another push factor of refugees. Many countries in the eastern region of Africa are suffering from high prices of basic commodities. The living expenses are very high. This had lowered the living standards and forced many people to flee to Kenya as refugees in search of greener pastures.

**(c) Challenges Faced by Refugees in Kenya:** - Refugees in Kenya just like in any other countries face a plethora of challenges in their day to day lives. These challenges range from social, economic and political backgrounds. Traditionally refugeeism is associated with all sorts of social evils like armed robberies, violation of human rights, drugs trafficking, environmental degradation and diseases epidemics (Wilson, 2005). It is on such basis that refugeeism is labelled and negatively perceived. This had contributed to stigma and discrimination of refugees in some parts of Kenya. The stigma and discrimination comes with devaluation and dehumanisation of refugees where the victims of refugeeism are perceived as less human with no value or rights. For this reason the positive role of refugees in the national development of Kenya has been undermined. They are prevented from developing their human potential and their ability to make a positive contribution to the economy and society of the country is limited. Stigma and discrimination of refugees resulted in a more serious social exclusion. From a functionalism perspective, every individual is functional towards the survival of the society. However the relevance, functions and necessity of refugeeism had been ignored. Rather it is only viewed from the dark side as a social threat institution that can capture the social and economic brilliance of the country. To this effect refugees are out casted and marginalised minority group with no identity.

There is a feeling amongst the local people that the presence of refugees in their communities is a threat. Basically for any society to progress there should be unity and every member of that particular society should live freely. However, the relationship between the refugees and some local people is not amicable. The local people believe that the presence of refugees in their communities had brought many bad effects than good. According to Hamity(2008) refugees are always attributed to insecurity, deforestation, and competition for natural resources, conflicts, inflation of food stuffs, environmental degradation and poor hygiene. All the blames put on the refugees had resulted in a hostile kind of relationship with the local people. In most cases it is hard for the refugees to fit properly in the communities of Kenya. There is a lack of social integration which is a key component in human development and economic growth. The issue of parallel lives in one community (refugee's life and local people's life) is one of the major challenges faced by victims of refugeeism. In a logical way, when the refugees escape from their countries of origins their goal is to find a comfortable and secure place to protect their lives. However, that is not the common case in some parts of Kenya. Although, refugees are accepted there is still lack of social integration and creation of a conducive environment. Instead of resting and relaxing refugees struggle to readjust and live a common life with the local people.

From a policy angle, the camping policy is also hindering social integration and economic growth. The refugee laws in Kenya have much restrictions especially the camping policy. This had confined refugees in camps and their interaction with the local people is limited. The psychological effects of the camping policy had forced many refugees to think that they are fenced, alienated and isolated people with no value to the societies of their host country Kenya. The camping system had also stripped off the capacity of refugees as economic beings. In their respective camps they face some challenges as they engage in social activities. Sometimes movement restrictions do not allow them to buy goods outside the camps. High price fluctuation, competition among themselves, lack of capital, poor infrastructure and poor access to the market are some of the challenges that hinder them to contribute economically. Although they engage in some income generating projects and small business ventures, these are not enough to meet the demands of their families and communities at large (Paludan, 2001). Refugees have capacity to contribute economically to their host countries. They have the ability to be self-reliant to reduce the burden from the government of their host countries. However, they are normally perceived as underprivileged minority group who should be pitied for and be beneficiaries of philanthropy. Thus their capacity as economic beings is stifled and they are associated with dependency syndrome.

Many refugees in Kenya face challenges in accessing basic necessities. Some of the challenges include inadequate food supply, poor shelter, poor access to education and health facilities, lack of clean water and sanitation. This is worsened by lack of resources, insecurity, unemployment, overpopulation and outbreak of diseases. All these problems create a situation in which refugees especially young men are involved in anti-social and risk sexual behaviors to cope up with stress. These challenges coupled with bad labels from the society lead some of the refugees to use illicit drugs as self-fulfilling prophecy or defense mechanisms to resist the pressure of life.

#### **IV. SOCIAL WORK AND REFUGEEISM**

Social work enhances the social wellbeing and the interaction between the person and the environment (Barbra and Baldwin, 2012). From an ecosystem perspective, social work uses a holistic approach to understand social issues and phenomenon like refugeeism. Using core values like service, social justice, and respect for the person, importance of relationships, integrity and competence, social work embraces refugeeism. From a social work perspective refugees are not just a mere minority group of underprivileged people but they are beings who deserve social justice, respect, social integration, integrity and access to all resources that promote self-sustenance and economic development. Social work should place refugeeism at the core of human development by restoring the psychosocial functioning and identity of refugees. However the place of social work is misunderstood in most developing countries (Lawrence, 2016). In most cases social work is only viewed from charity and philanthropic perspectives. This is the reason why all minority and underprivileged groups are put under the custody of social workers as welfare beneficiaries. Social work is only attached to humanitarian aid and other things like counselling thereby ignoring that it is a profession of many faces. Most government policies had conditioned social work practice to be dependent in nature. However, in reality social work is beyond that because it is concerned with changing the oppressive and destructive social conditions affecting the lives of refugees through a developmental approach that upholds human rights.

**(a) Roles of Social Workers in Kenya:** -OseiHwedie (2000) stated that Social workers should appreciate and accept social diversity. They should not judge or discriminate people based on their circumstances, background, form, race, language, ethnicity, political affiliation, religion and sexual orientation. Social Workers in Kenya are also practicing in the field of refugeeism which demand a pragmatic circular and experimental opportunities that capture theoretical practice and knowledge. Some professions in Kenya have negative views about refugeeism.

As a step of promoting social wellbeing, it is crucial for social work as a helping profession to work with the victims of refugeeism. Some of the general roles of Social workers in Kenya include:

**Mediating-** In the mediating role Social Workers intervene in disputes and conflicts between two or more parties and help them to find a common resolution or mutual understanding. As mediators they take neutral stance among the involved parties to assist them to compromise, reconcile differences and reach mutual satisfying agreements.

**Counselling-** This involves individuals and groups. As counselors, Social Workers help clients to clarify their problems, express their needs and to explore resolution strategies using holistic approaches. They apply intervention and strategies to develop and expand clients' inherent capacity to deal with their own problems more effectively. In this role Social Workers empower clients by affirming their personal strengths and capacities to make good choices and solve problems effectively.

**Researcher-** Social Workers are involved in researches to evaluate intervention practice and program outcomes. In the research role Social Workers, critically analyse the literature on current issues and topics and use the obtained information to inform policy and practice. They extend, disseminate knowledge and enhance the effectiveness of the social work practice.

**Advocacy-** Social Workers fight for the rights of the minority, disadvantaged and disempowered with the goal of empowering them and improve their social wellbeing. They advocate on behalf of the clients when the responsible authorities are not listening or when the clients are not able to do so.

**Case Manager-** Social workers deal with various cases especially among the disadvantaged groups and children, as case managers they deal with child rights and welfare cases and complex cases that need home visits and thorough assessments.

**Linking resource systems (Broker) -** Social Workers are responsible for identifying and linking resources to the clients in need in a timely manner. After assessing the needs of clients they identify the potential services for them and make referrals. As brokers, Social workers help various groups like the homeless, elderly, victims of chronic diseases, persons with disabilities, refugees, children in need, women, drug addicts, victims of domestic violence and other crimes, bereaved and other vulnerable groups. They help these clients to choose the most appropriate service option and negotiate the terms of service delivery. Social Workers are also concerned with the quality, quantity and accessibility of services by their clients.

**Lobbying-** Social Workers lobby the relevant authorities to influence policy change. They engage with policy makers and the authorities to create conducive environments for their clientele. Social workers are agents of change and they engage their communities to improve the structures and coordination of resources and services.

**Facilitator-** Social Workers are involved in gathering groups of people together to facilitate community development, self-advocacy and policy change. As facilitators, Social Workers are involved as group therapists and task group leaders.

**Education-** Societies in general need to be sensitised on current social issues. Therefore Social Workers are involved in teaching people and promoting awareness on all issues that affects their daily lives.

In carrying out all these roles Social Workers in Kenya are mandated by the Kenya National Association of Social Workers to follow ethics and values. According to Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman (2004) social work as a profession has many roles that are guided by ethics and values. The social workers in Kenya use most of these roles to work with their refugee clients.

**(b) Social Work Interventions in Refugeeism in Kenya-** The Social Work profession is committed to maximize the wellbeing of individuals and society. It considers that the wellbeing of individuals and societies is underpinned by socially inclusive societies that uphold the principles of social justice, respect for human dignity and human rights (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2016). In this regard the social work profession supports and enacts the United Nations' conventions related to refugees and human rights. Accordingly, the government of Kenya gave Social Workers the responsibility of ensuring the welfare of refugees. Although Social Workers are working tirelessly to improve the refugeeism fraternity in Kenya their efforts are hindered by unsupportive policies, lack of resources and attitudinal barriers from some local people. Since refugees are seen as beneficiaries of charity most of the Social Workers' interventions are remedial or dependent social work oriented. Although they are involved in promoting income generating projects and entrepreneurship initiatives among the refugees, it is not suffice to meet their life demands. These interventions solve the problems on a temporary basis. They lack the capacity to create sustainable ventures that promote self-sustenance among the victims of refugeeism.

Social Workers are stationed in every refugee camp across the country in various settings with a range of roles like casework, community work, management and policy. According to Rank and Hutchison (2000) Social Workers work with groups, communities and organisations to respond to shared goals. They facilitate the collaboration of organisations and professional groups concerned and work in partnership to maximise results. Social Workers in Kenya work together with other professionals, government agencies and non-governmental organisations to build empathic relationships with refugees in an ethical, respectful, client centered and strengths

focused manner. In these camps, Social Workers are involved in counseling, researching, linking and allocating resources, lobbying, facilitating life skills and business workshop and coordinating income generating projects. Mupedziswa (1993) argued that Social workers offer a valuable and unique contribution in providing appropriate and targeted interventions to ensure the promotion of wellbeing, linking of services, access and equity. The contribution of Social Workers in Kenya is particularly valued with regard to the planning and management of complex cases among refugees and its ability to engage in both refugees and systemic issues and advocacy.

As a borrowed profession, social work extracts knowledge from other disciplines like social sciences and humanities to focus on the interface between refugees, their families and the environment. Reichert (2011) stated that social work recognises the impact of social, economic, political, spiritual and cultural factors on the wellbeing of individuals and their communities. Accordingly Social Workers in their respective camps and other duty stations maintain a dual focus in both helping and improving refugees' wellbeing. They are usually involved in thorough professional assessments. Through strengths based community assessments and strength based psychosocial assessments, they identify and address any external issues that may impact wellbeing such as discrimination, inequality and injustice. With a goal of upholding dignity, Social Workers ensure that refugees are treated with dignity and respect to strengthen community and social interdependence they also put refugees at the forefront in all decision making processes that influence their lives and future. Tracy and Whittaker (2015) posited that Social Workers establish comprehensive political advocacy strategies in consultation with the affected people. These strategies reflect grassroots perspectives on refugees' aspirations, needs and solutions in Kenya. Social Workers engage in researches and develop social work models that support refugees and link them with resources. Linking refugees and their families to the community networks promotes case management services and access of services across health, welfare and other systems.

Social workers provide culturally responsive and inclusive support services (Cooper, 2007). They empower refugees to explore and use locally available services and resource. This helps refugees and their families to either resettle in the host countries or to repatriate to their countries of origins. Utilising advance interpersonal and professional skills Social Workers provide specialist culturally sensitive counselling with regard to torture, trauma, loss and grief to avoid suicidal thoughts among refugees. Social Workers address particular psychological needs to enhance good mental health of their refugee clients. As educators they also educate, orient, sensitise and engage communities in Kenya on refugeeism issues. They spread awareness to the general populace, service providers and other professional about refugeeism. Generally the interventions of Social Workers in refugeeism in Kenya are very broad in scope and they are determined by the setting and available resources.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

Literature points to the fact that the place of refugeeism in the societies is not fully understood but it has found a good place in the social work practice of Kenya. There are many social work interventions put in place to deal with refugeeism crisis. However the existence of unsupportive policies, lack of awareness, lack of resources and negative attitudes hindered the full implementation of the developmental social work approach that promotes suitable development and self-sustenance. The current atmosphere in the refugeeism fraternity only supports dependent social work through charity and philanthropic initiatives. This had stifled the capacity of refugees as economic beings and promoted dependence syndrome. In short negative perceptions on refugeeism had created dependent refugeeism which is very costly to Kenya as the host country. However, if developmental social work is fully implemented this dependent refugeeism can be transformed into a developmental refugeeism that can have positive contributions to the economic growth of Kenya. Refugeeism is not an economic burden but it is a tool of development if handled properly.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Developmental social work should be fully implemented as a mechanism of paradigm shift from dependent refugeeism to developmental refugeeism.
- Sensitisation and refugeeism awareness programs should be carried out to give knowledge and spread awareness among the local people to curb negative perceptions about refugees.
- There is need of regulatory reform to reduce the burden that comes through strict refugee laws like the camp policy.
- Refugeeism should be redefined to suit the host communities' understanding.

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