

Access to Livelihoods for Urban Refugees in Kenya: The Case Study of Somalis Living in Eastleigh

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Abstract : In Kenya, refugee situations are becoming increasingly protracted, stretching over the years or even decades. As urbanization rates increase, so do the numbers of urban refugees in the country. Refugees living in urban areas face a range of challenges. In their efforts to pursue livelihoods, refugees have identified strategies to confront these challenges. In the same manner, humanitarian actors have come up with different interventions to promote access to livelihoods working through obstacles and barriers created by host governments. This paper seeks to understand the experience of Somali urban refugees living in the urban area of Eastleigh, Nairobi, both by investigating their own actions towards creating avenues to access livelihoods and by understanding their social, economic and policy context in which they forge livelihoods. The empirical data collected through fieldwork in Nairobi in 2020 serves as the basis of this qualitative case study. Drawing upon the themes of urban refugee movement, Somali ethnicity, citizenship discrimination and the livelihoods of refugees, the paper highlights how the actions of the Kenyan government and international non-governmental organization (INGO)s affect access to livelihoods and the consequences of these actions for Somali urban refugees. The results of the paper found that Somali urban refugees are taking active steps to create livelihoods for themselves. This is seen in the growth of Eastleigh as an economic hub in Kenya which is owned and run mostly by Somalis. Indeed, the Somali community is central to the establishment of networks in the neighborhood. Somali urban refugees are marginalized by the Kenyan government, reducing their opportunity to create dignified lives in Eastleigh. Findings also point out the community-based approaches used by INGOs in livelihood interventions. The relevance of this research lies in the interconnection of humanitarian development interventions for protracted refugees and the promotion of livelihoods in an urban and global context.

Keywords : Kenya, livelihoods, Somali, urban refugees

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