MYTHS AND TRUTHS

THE FACTS ABOUT REFUGEE SELF-SUFFICIENCY AND ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION IN NAIROBI
Refugee Consortium of Kenya with the financial and technical support of the Great Lakes Programme of the Danish Refugee Council.

October, 2015

Photographs by Axel Fassio / DRC
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was commissioned by the Refugee Consortium of Kenya (RCK) with the financial and technical assistance of the Great Lakes Programme (GLP) under the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). The research was overseen and directed by a study advisory group (SAG). The SAG comprised of staff drawn from RCK and GLP who dedicated their time to review the initial drafts of the report.

The GLP has been supporting RCK advocacy and research activities since 2011. One of the notable achievements in law and policy in Kenya through this partnership was the adoption of the IDP Act in 2012. The Act addressed a major gap that existed at the time, namely the total absence of an IDP law in Kenya. This has been well documented in a report supported by GLP titled Behind the scenes: lessons learnt from developing a national policy framework on internal displacement in Kenya.

RCK and GLP team is grateful to all refugees and organizations that participated in the research process. Special mention is given to the nine refugees and one Kenyan national who offered their services as enumerators and who moved around in the community collecting data for this study. To them we say thank you very much.
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<td>AU</td>
<td>African Union</td>
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<td>DRA</td>
<td>Department of Refugee Affairs</td>
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<td>DRC</td>
<td>Danish Refugee Council</td>
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<td>EC</td>
<td>Eligibility Committee</td>
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<td>International Rescue Committee</td>
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<td>KRA</td>
<td>Kenya Revenue Authority</td>
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<td>Ksh</td>
<td>Kenya Shilling</td>
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<td>MTA</td>
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<td>Organization of African Unity</td>
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<td>PIN</td>
<td>Personal Identification Number</td>
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<td>RAB</td>
<td>Refugee Affairs Board</td>
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Kenya has been hosting refugees and asylum seekers since the early 1960s. There are currently over half a million refugees in the country. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), a majority of these refugees and asylum seekers reside in the camps while 10.5% reside in urban areas, and in particular, Nairobi. Over the years of refugee hosting, Kenyans – who are essentially the host community – have formulated and crystalized some perceptions of refugees particularly those that reside in urban areas.

These perceptions have morphed into myths that surround urban refugees in Kenya. The myths range from viewing refugees as fully supported by the UNHCR and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to viewing refugees as exceedingly wealthy but at the same time not contributing to the economy. These perceptions, among others, have contributed to Kenyans viewing refugees and asylum seekers with suspicion that have, in turn, led to growing feelings of xenophobia towards refugees in the country.

This study was commissioned to investigate the level of refugee contribution to the economy at the household level as well as the independence of that contribution from UNHCR and NGO assistance. The study had three main objectives which included an investigation into types of livelihood activities that urban refugees are engaged in; the amount of money that urban refugees earn and their expenditure pattern in Nairobi and the extent to which Kenyan law and policy framework provide a conducive environment for refugees to access the right to work.

It focused on Nairobi as the main urban centre that refugees reside in. RCK interviewed a total of 630 refugee households which were represented by the head of household, employing quota sampling methods. Members of different nationalities were also represented in the sample size to ensure representativeness of the results of the research. Data was collected between April and May 2015. A number of conclusions were drawn from the data analysis as follows:

1. **Refugees are self sufficient**

There are claims that refugees in Kenya wholly depend on income and support from the UN and NGOs for their sustenance. However, this research has found out that, only 3% of urban refugees completely rely on NGO support for their sustenance. The majority (97%) rely on remittances, business profits and employment for income. This shows a strong, independent desire to be self-sufficient thus countering the notion that refugee wholly rely on NGO assistance for their survival.
2. **Refugees are not as wealthy as they are made out to be**

Another myth surrounding refugees living in urban areas is that they are very wealthy. Contrary to popular beliefs, the results indicate the opposite as more than half of the refugee population (67%) earn less than the national average income which is Ksh. 30,861.69. This is a clear indication that refugees do not have the huge amounts of money they are believed to have. This myth is fuelled by how Kenyan nationals interpret aspects of refugee culture such as dressing to signify flamboyance and thus wealth.

3. **Refugees do contribute to the economy**

Besides being customers and creating demand for goods and services, the study found that refugee households with businesses create employment for refugees and Kenyan nationals. Almost half (49%) of all those working in refugee-owned enterprises are Kenyan nationals. This is a positive contribution by the refugees, considering the relatively high level of unemployment in Kenya.

4. **Kenyan law and policy framework does not allow adequate access to work for refugees**

The study found that in spite of provisions related to access to work for refugees, the encampment policy is a major challenge for urban refugees to access work. Considering that all refugees are supposed to reside in the camps, urban refugees are often unwilling to seek necessary documents such as work permits, which are secured in Nairobi, for fear of being forced to go to the camps.

The above perceptions have led or are likely to lead to negative attitudes towards refugees including xenophobia. While raising awareness among the general public on the situation of refugees in the country may address the perceptions that lead to xenophobia, development and implementation of a strong legal and policy framework would ensure refugees access rights such as the right to work. This should be coupled with a vigorous advocacy and lobbying campaign targeting the Government of Kenya and other local duty bearers to address the issue of forced encampment of refugees and asylum seekers.
1 INTRODUCTION

This study sought to investigate the self-sufficiency and economic contribution of refugees to the urban economy in Kenya. There is a gap in available literature on this subject while Kenyan refugee policy on access to work is still wanting. In investigating the self-sufficiency of refugees in urban areas, the study examines the suitability of Kenya’s refugee policy to the attainment of the right to work for refugees and infuses the findings with data collected from the field. The result is a useful discussion on refugee self-sufficiency and the extent to which Kenyan asylum law and policy supports it.

The information contained in this study report is a contribution to the growing body of knowledge on urban refugees. The report seeks to illuminate the level of self-sufficiency among urban refugees by examining the contribution of these refugees, at the household level, to their local economies in the areas they reside. Self-sufficiency in this study is measured through the amount of income, expenditure and savings that refugees have. This is evaluated at the household level or at the microeconomic level. In particular, it examines the types of economic activities they engage in and looks at the levels of self-sufficiency to understand how refugees and asylum seekers attain economic sustainability in urban areas.

Finally, the report offers recommendations drawn from the findings of the information gathered from refugees and asylum seekers in Nairobi. The recommendations are addressed to the Government of Kenya, UNHCR, non-governmental organizations working in the urban refugee sector and refugees and asylum seekers themselves.

1.1 BACKGROUND

Kenya has hosted refugees since the 1960s (Abuya, 2007 p.54). At that time the numbers of refugees were below 20,000 and thus were manageable (Abuya, 2007 p.54). Refugees had the right to freely move and settle anywhere in Kenya and had access to work as they were issued with work permits (Freudenthaler, 2012 p.109). However the political turmoil1 of the 1990s saw this number increase tenfold and soon the Kenyan refugee management system became overwhelmed and subsequently collapsed (Abuya, 2004 p.3). It was at this time that refugee policy has become stricter as refugees were perceived as a liability to the Kenyan political, economic and social fabric.

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1 This refers to the break out of political violence in Somalia as Siad Barre’s regime collapsed, Ethiopia during the ouster of Mengistu Halle Marriam’s government and South Sudan during the second civil war that began in 1983 to 2005. All these states are Kenya’s neighbors and therefore first point of call for civilians fleeing the conflict in their respective states.
As the number of refugees increased, Kenyan refugee policy hardened because refugees were increasingly being perceived as a threat to national security. From the 1990s to date, refugees and asylum seekers have continually been linked to Kenya’s insecurity and economic woes. This link has been perpetuated by politicians. For example, in 2004, the Vice President of the Republic of Kenya Hon. Moody Awori linked refugee hosting to an increase in proliferation of light arms and small weapons (Campbell, 2005 p.10). Refugees and asylum seekers were also associated with increasing unemployment rates as the country struggled to implement the structural adjustment programme. More recently, refugees and asylum seekers have been linked to terrorism.  

This linkage to terrorism and the perception that they support terror groups such as Al-Shabaab, has negatively impacted refugee work rights. It has led to the strict implementation of encampment policy which is meant to limit their right of movement which, in turn, affects their right to work. On March 17th 2014, the Government of Kenya gazetted Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps as the official and exclusive refugees and asylum seekers hosting areas citing security concerns. This limitation on their right to movement means that they cannot legally access work permits which is a necessary requirement in order to legally work in Kenya. Refugees and asylum seekers are granted movement passes to move outside the camps only for reasons of health, resettlement interviews and higher education. Seeking work permits is not a legitimate reason for accessing the movement pass and thus should urban refugees move to the camps they may not have access to this document. Moreover, the linkage between insecurity and refugee-hosting has brought out the pre-existing anecdotal view that refugees – particularly the ones residing in urban areas – are a liability to the economy of the nation. Refugees are often seen to rely on laundered money from Somali pirates and Al-Shabaab to finance their stay in Kenya. Such views are manifested through the argument that refugees in urban areas contribute to the increase of rent prices, owing to access to these laundered funds, and thus threaten the economic capacity of Kenyans to get accommodation and be economically secure. This view coupled with the unsubstantiated perception that refugees and asylum seekers contribute to insecurity in the country has led the Kenyan public to view them with mistrust and suspicion. In some areas it has led to outright hostility towards them; hostility that is not driven by facts but rather by fear-mongering and anecdotes. For instance, during the Usalama Watch – a government-driven security operation that was meant to flush out illegal immigrants in urban areas – in April 2014, some refugees were shunned from using public transportation for fear that they may be terrorists. It also targeted refugees and asylum seekers with the objective of transporting them to the refugee camps.  

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research activity was guided by three research questions:
1. What livelihood activities do urban refugees in Nairobi engage in?
2. How much do urban refugees earn and spend in Nairobi?
3. Does the Kenyan legal and policy framework provide a conducive environment for refugees to access the right to work and thus be self-sufficient?

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3 See RCK Usalama Watch Briefing Notes in file with the author
1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The overall objective of this research is to examine the level of economic self-sufficiency among refugees in Nairobi and their contribution to the urban economy in order to counter popular myths and misconceptions about refugees in Kenyan urban areas. The specific research objectives include:

1. To examine the types of livelihood activities that urban refugees are engaged in;
2. To assess the amount of money that urban refugees earn and their expenditure pattern in Nairobi.
3. To analyse the extent to which Kenyan law and policy framework provide a conducive environment for refugees to access the right to work;
2 LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of the literature reveals that this topic is sparingly researched. It also reveals that the main focus of relevant studies looking at the economic activities of refugees in urban areas focuses on refugees in Nairobi. However, despite the limited number of studies on this topic, they all agree that refugees are self-sufficient and that they positively contribute to the economy of the areas that they reside in.

UNHCR and DRC (2014) conducted a study that looked into the livelihood of refugees living in Nairobi. The research looked at refugees residing in Eastleigh, and was conducted through focus group discussions. The findings of that research show that a majority of refugees earn between Ksh.10,000 and Ksh.30,000 per month. It also found that refugees are engaged in the informal sector of the Kenyan economy. However, the study was not exclusively investigating the level of self-sufficiency of refugees in Nairobi. As such, it did not touch on the independence of refugees’ income from NGO assistance. It also did not look into the businesses owned by refugees or whether these businesses employ people including Kenyans. Finally, although it analyses expenditure patterns, it does not consider savings or assets owned by refugees.

Pavanello, Elthaway and Pantuliano (2010) also examined the question of refugee economic livelihood. Their study was broadly looking at the protection issues faced by refugees in urban areas. The study’s findings were similar to those in the UNHCR and DRC report, namely that refugees were economically engaged in the informal sector. It also found that a majority of refugees earn between USD50 and USD150 per month and that a sizeable refugee population relied on remittances from abroad. Nevertheless, there are areas that were outside the scope of this study. The first is the lack of an assessment of the independence of the income received by refugees. Another is that it lacks an analysis of expenditure and savings patterns that are important in assessing the sustainability of incomes. Thirdly, although the study found that refugees do work, it does not analyse the possession of documents - such as work permits – necessary for legally and sustainably accessing employment.

Another relevant study was conducted by Campbell, Kakusu and Musyemi (2006). This study looks at the livelihoods of Congolese refugees in Nairobi. Its findings are on the same line as the previous two research reports reviewed: Congolese refugees earn a living mainly in the informal sector through provisions of services such as music, tailoring and hairdressing. This study also found that Congolese refugees rely on remittances from North America, Europe and Australia for their economic survival in Nairobi. Finally the study found that there is a linkage between livelihoods and local integration: if refugees become more self-sufficient, they are more likely to integrate locally. As the aforementioned
studies, this study also did not cover an element on the self-sufficiency of refugees in Nairobi. Other than the finding that Congolese refugees heavily rely on remittances and the businesses they own, it did not consider an analysis of the level of income independence from NGO funding. Another gap is the direct correlation between livelihoods and local integration without considering the intervening variables of political and social hospitality of the host country. Last, its scope and findings are limited to the Congolese refugee community.
3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 SAMPLE SIZE

The sample size for this study was 630 households out of a total of 7,312 households in Nairobi. The household figure was derived from an assumption made that the average family size of refugees is 7 individuals. The sample household figure was arrived at by using a confidence level of 95% with a confidence interval of 4. The households interviewed and their respective nationalities is represented in figure 1 below.

![Figure 1: Distribution of respondent households (HH) per nationality](image)

This mean that if a similar research is repeated, there is 95% chance that the results will be the same and there is a 4% chance the results will be different.

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4 This mean that if a similar research is repeated, there is 95% chance that the results will be the same and there is a 4% chance the results will be different.
3.2 SAMPLING

A quota sampling process was used to select the respondents. As there are more than nine refugee nationalities residing in Kenya, the research focussed on the Burundians, Congolese, Eritreans, Ethiopians Rwandese, Somali, South Sudanese, Tanzanians and Ugandans as distinct subject groups in the quota sampling process. These nationalities represent the majority of refugees residing in urban areas. The study decided to include representatives of as many nationalities as possible residing in Nairobi so that the results would be more representative of the refugees’ situation.

The research project targeted refugees living in six localities within Nairobi County. These areas are Eastleigh, Kawangware, Kayole, Kitengela, Jamhuri and Kasarani. These are areas where refugees and asylum seekers are ordinarily found to be residing. For instance, a majority of Somali refugees reside in Eastleigh whereas a majority of Congolese and Ethiopian refugees reside in Kasarani and Jamhuri respectively. Targeting various localities within Nairobi County provides a more representative sample than if refugees from a single locality were selected.

A total of ten enumerators, who were working as either community-based counsellors or protection monitors, and were from each of the different nationalities, were recruited to collect data. This was because these individuals already have the trust of the community and thus more refugees and asylum seekers would be inclined to share sensitive information with them. One RCK staff was also engaged to assist in data collection and to supervise the process. They were each trained on data collection methods provided with a semi structured questionnaire with which to collect data from the population sample.

Data was also collected from governmental and non-governmental organizations that provide livelihood-related services to refugees in the urban areas through semi-structured questionnaires. These organizations include the Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS), Danish Refugee Council (DRC), International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Refuge Point. Information from these organizations was used to provide valuable insight on the sustainability of the refugee economy in the urban areas.

3.3 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This research chose to study refugees and asylum seekers in Nairobi and particularly in the areas mentioned under section 3.2. Nairobi was chosen to represent all other urban centres as the only urban centre in Kenya where refugee figures are publicly available. This is because refugees and asylum seekers rarely register themselves with the Department of Refugee Affairs (DRA) or with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and thus it is difficult to get a figure for the purposes of sampling. Secondly, Nairobi was chosen because the sample is easily accessible as refugee residence sites in Nairobi is common knowledge among refugee agencies.

3.4 LIMITATIONS

One of the limitations encountered in the process of collecting data for this research was proportional participation of nationalities. According to UNHCR statistics, there are 32,061 Somali refugees and asylum seekers residing in urban areas. This translates to 56% of the urban refugee population. However, only 15% of this population consented to participate in the research. The reasons for this low turnout was the male head of the households stated that they were too busy for interviews. This was compounded by the fact that some of their wives did not have information as to how much money their husbands made for the household. The effect of this limitation is that the Somali participants may not be an accurate representation of the population.
Another limitation was centred on divulging information about income for fear of losing social assistance. Some of the respondents from the sample population were worried that should they divulge how much they earn, the social assistance that they enjoy from NGOs would be reduced. They held this opinion even after it was explained to them that utmost anonymity would be maintained and no personal information would be divulged to any NGO providing social assistance. The effect of this is however negligible as only 3% of the sample population declined to respond to the question on how much they earned.

Some respondents refrained from providing information about the assets they owned partly because they were apprehensive about how this information would be used even after being assured of their anonymity. Another explanation could be that refugees in urban areas may not want to disclose their assets in case they would one day be repatriated to their country of origin as they could be afraid of the fate of their properties.

3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Respondents of this research were adequately informed about their anonymity and confidentiality during data collection. During this entire process, no pictures or names were taken. This was a measure to secure the anonymity of the respondents as sharing their personal information and identities could potentially compromise their security.
4 MYTHS AND FACTS

4.1 MYTH 1 / REFUGEES ARE NOT SELF SUFFICIENT

While many Kenyans perceive refugees in urban areas as exclusively relying on NGO hand-outs, the facts bear a different story. Figure 2 below shows the distribution of sources of income. As is depicted, business profits and employment take up the chunk of urban refugee income sources with 29% and 28% respectively. Remittances either from abroad or local also take up a sizable proportion at 30%, with NGO assistance or mixed incomes being the least stated sources of income. Mixed incomes included households that have more than one stream of income such as a mix of profits and social assistance or profits and remittances from abroad.
Kenyan nationals in urban centres have made a case that refugees living in urban areas are assisted by UNHCR and other NGOs to earn a living. Part of the anger towards refugees stems from this notion. However, this appears not to be the case according to our findings: only a meagre 3% of the population rely on NGO assistance.

In connection to the foregoing, respondents were asked whether they received any form of assistance from NGOs in the past 6 months. The majority (65%) stated that they did not receive any assistance from either UNHCR or NGOs. Only 33% of the respondents stated that they had received some form of assistance.

The table below shows the nature of assistance provided. The largest amount of assistance recorded was on food items with education assistance being the least. Some 11% of the households recorded a combination of assistance provided such as legal assistance and food items or money and legal assistance.

The results of the study show that 30% of all sources of income for refugees living in Nairobi come from remittances. Whereas this is beneficial in boosting their incomes, it poses a challenge to refugees who solely rely on this form of income which is exclusively made of Eritreans. This is because remittances are transmitted through money transfer agencies (MTA) which have increasingly come under scrutiny. This scrutiny has been occasioned by the belief that these MTAs are funding terrorist groups. In April 2015 for example, the Kenyan Government shut down these MTAs as it suspected them of funding the Al-Shabaab terror group. Despite the impact of such a move being outside the scope of this study, there is no doubt that it negatively impacted on the lives of the population that exclusively rely on it for their survival.

When it comes to the type of economic activity, 1 in 2 refugees is self-employed while 23% of them are employed as casual workers or in the informal sector. Some 25% of them are not in any employment. The latter exclusively consists of Eritreans. This latter group stated that they did not apply for work
permits because of the bureaucratic processes involved in getting these documents.

As stated above, half of the refugees are self-employed and engage in small and medium business activities. The table below shows the most popular and least popular business ventures among the population polled. From the results, it seems that a majority of refugees from the Horn of Africa gravitate towards retail businesses while those from the Great Lakes regions have proclivities for service-based businesses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NATIONALITY</th>
<th>MOST POPULAR</th>
<th>LEAST POPULAR</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somali</td>
<td>Mini-stores, Kiosks</td>
<td>Salons</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethiopians</td>
<td>Kiosks &amp; food retailing</td>
<td>Video productions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eritreans</td>
<td>Food retailing</td>
<td>Photography &amp; tailoring</td>
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<tr>
<td>Congolese</td>
<td>Tailoring &amp; hair salons</td>
<td>Singing &amp; second hand clothes retailing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others⁵</td>
<td>Tailoring</td>
<td>Second hand clothes retailing</td>
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</table>

A majority of refugees (53%) received some form of assistance in setting up their businesses while 38% did not. The sources of the capital to set up the businesses are as depicted in figure 4 below. A majority of the financing came from remittances from friends and family either in Kenya or abroad while others received funding from NGOs and financial institutions. The rest that did not need any assistance used their savings to start their businesses.

It is worth emphasising the independence of refugee businesses from NGO support as far as capital is concerned. This report found that a majority of those engaged in their own businesses did not receive start-up capital from NGOs, which indicates a high level of independence from refugee agencies.

![Figure 4: Sources of refugee business financing](image)

The research also attempted to figure out how many of the household members are engaged in gainful employment or run a business. A total of 37% had only one member engaged in any form of livelihood activity whereas 21% of the population have more than one person engaged in gainful employment. The remainder of the households (24%) had no member engaged in any gainful employment. This further shows that a majority of refugees in urban areas do engage in some livelihood activities and

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⁵ This group includes Ugandans, Rwandans, Burundi and a Tanzanian.
thus further negating the notion of reliance on NGO support.

Figure 5 compares the levels of household income per month and the number of household members who are working. The graph depicts the results of this comparison. Households that recorded one member as being engaged in an economic activity had higher rates of income in all income brackets apart from the Ksh. 30,001-50,000 and the Ksh. 50,001-70,000 brackets. Interestingly, households that recorded unemployment of their members recorded higher incomes than those that had two or more in all income levels apart from the Ksh. 30,001-50,000 and over Ksh. 70,001 levels. The 24% that recorded a lack of employment or business ownership rely on remittances which make 30% of the total earnings by refugees.

Figure 5: Level of income per working HH member

It is therefore evident from these findings that, refugees are self-reliant with their main sources of income being from employment (formal and informal), profits from business activities and remittances from friends and relatives abroad and locally.
Another perception closely related to refugee self-sufficiency is an assumption that refugees have a very high income. This has been found to be untrue. Figure 6 is a graphical representation of the amount of money earned per month in Kenyan shillings by refugee households polled in this study. Half of the refugees (49%) earn between Ksh. 10,001-30,000. The findings also show that there is almost an equal number of households earning below Ksh. 10,000 and those earning between Ksh. 30,001-50,000. Those households earning more than Ksh. 50,000 account for 12%. According to the Government of Kenya (2015), the average real income for Kenyans stands at Ksh. 30,861.69. This means that a considerable majority of the refugees earn below the national income average.

These results refute the claim that refugees often have large sums of money to spend as a clear sign of their wealth. This notion has been entertained in the minds of many Kenyans. Campbell, Kakusu and Musyemi (2006, p.99) record in their study that this perception among the Congolese is fuelled by their flamboyant dress. They are deemed to be wealthy also because they come from a resource rich state. These findings are supported by another study that found that many Kenyan landlords charge refugees more money than Kenyan tenants living in the same area based on the perception that they were wealthy (Pavanello, Elhaway & Pantuliano, 2010).

However, according to the findings, this is not the case. If a majority of the refugees living in Nairobi earn between Ksh 10,000-30,000 then it is inconceivable that they would enjoy the lavish lifestyles that they are made out to enjoy. Moreover, considering that only 12% of the respondents earn more than Ksh. 50,000 compared to 23% of the Kenyan population in the same income level (Daily Nation, 2013), one can hardly say that refugees in urban areas are wealthier than nationals.

Finally, Pavanello, Elhaway and Pantuliano (2010, p.24) found that refugees and asylum seekers often go without food and other basic needs to cater for accommodation. Therefore looking at the results of this study that are in accordance with the findings of the two studies mentioned above, the perception that refugees are very wealthy is not founded.
The table above shows the level of income distribution per nationality. It shows that Ethiopians and Eritreans are among the top earners as they contribute 3.92% of the respondent population earning above Ksh. 70,001. They are followed by Somali, Congolese, Burundian and the Rwandan communities respectively.

Figure 8 above shows distribution of income per length of stay in Kenya. A conclusion one draws from the graph is that levels of income disparities are higher among households that have lived in Kenya shorter relative to the other households that have been in Kenya longer.

Another conclusion one could draw is that there are far more recent urban refugee residents than
there are older ones. This presents an opportunity to learn what happens to the Nairobi population as time passes by. Do they leave Nairobi for other towns or do they leave the country all together? What could be the reason for their migration? Are they actually moving or is it that there is a larger influx of recent refugee and asylum seeker population than there is an older caseload? These are some of the questions that can be addressed in other research project.

4.3 MYTH 3 / REFUGEES ARE A LIABILITY AND A BURDEN TO THE ECONOMY

In terms of economic contribution, refugees provide employment opportunities for refugees and Kenyans. About half of the refugee business owners hire employees of whom the highest percentage (49%) are Kenyans (see figure 9). This is followed by Congolese, Ethiopians and Somalis at 17%, 15% and 12% respectively. The other half of the businesses have a sole proprietorship and thus do not need to employ others.

This finding is important considering the level of unemployment in Kenya. According to the Trading Economics (2015), the level of unemployment in Kenya stands at 40%. Considering that refugee enterprise provides employment for Kenyans more than for any other nationality, the results of the study show a positive contribution to the economy of the country. The Kenyans employed by these refugees are able to make a living and, in turn, spend money in the country which also benefits the economy.

Business owners stated that the vast majority of their customers consists primarily of Kenyan nationals. This means that refugees in Nairobi are involved in providing goods and services to Kenyans living in these areas and, in turn, that they contribute to the overall gross domestic product (GDP), an indicator of economic growth of the Kenyan economy.

Refugees also own assets which they have purchased in Kenya which is also another contribution to the economy of the country. A majority of the refugees (55%) do not have any assets while 45% have.
The pie chart below presents the types of assets owned by this group.

Figure 10: Pie chart depicting assets owned by refugees

It should be noted that this is one of the questions that was poorly responded to as mentioned in the limitation section. One reason for this is the fear that should they be repatriated, the fate of their property and their titles would not be certain. A detailed research on the refugee ownership of land and property in the country of asylum ought to be done to understand under what tenures these properties are held and policy pitfalls in case of disposing these properties when refugees eventually repatriate.

Nonetheless, there are some conclusions that can be deducted from the information above. One is that despite a challenging legal and policy environment, refugees are still willing to invest in their country of asylum. Another conclusion is that refugees are willing and able to create wealth for themselves and in turn contribute to the wellbeing of the economy.

Refugees also contribute to the urban economy through the purchase and consumption of goods and services. Respondents were asked to estimate how much they spend on the items indicated below on a six-month basis. A large portion, as can be seen from the table, goes to rent, followed by food and then school fees. It is worth mentioning that about 1 in 3 refugees pay business and wage income taxes.

6 The results were then divided by the number of respondents and by six to come up with the monthly figure
Part of the problem in payment of taxes is the lack of documentation. For one to pay taxes in Kenya, they would require a personal identification number (PIN) certificate which is issued by the Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA). Unfortunately the document is currently out of reach for refugees. One of the reasons could be traced to the lack of information among refugees about the legal requirement to pay taxes while residing in Kenya. In addition, refugees are ill- and insufficiently informed about how they can apply for the PIN number and become tax payers. Therefore this is a gap that needs to be urgently addressed. Should this information be provided to refugees, it will create an avenue for the state to get more resources through taxes.

Refugees’ savings score at the low side: more than half of them do not put any money aside largely due to their meagre earnings. This position appears to be vindicated by the level of expenses refugees make on a monthly basis. Where 67% earn Ksh. 30,000 and below, it is understandable in the face of the expenses that such a high figure does not leave room to save money.

However 38% of refugee households put away some of their money for future purposes, such as for an emergency or investments. The graph below shows their preferred place to store money. The fact that a majority of the households save their money on their phones and banks means that transactions made by these refugees through these channels contribute to the profitability of the banks and mobile phone companies which, in turn, contribute to the economy of the nation.
4.4 MYTH 4 / REFUGEES ENJOY FULL RIGHT TO EMPLOYMENT IN KENYA

Kenyan law recognizes the right to work for refugees. Section 16 of the Refugees Act, 2006 provides that ‘refugees are entitled to the rights and are subject to the obligations contained in the international conventions to which Kenya is party.’ This means that article 17 and 18 of the UN convention on the status relating to refugees applies. Article 17 covers the right to wage-earning employment while article 18 covers the right to self-employment. These articles bind a state signatory to accord to refugees’ treatment that is as favourable as possible but one that is not ‘less than the treatment accorded to aliens generally in the same circumstances.’

These provisions have been reproduced under section 16(4) of the Refugees Act, 2006. However this section only mentions access to wage-earning employment and nothing on self-employment. This in itself is not detrimental to the right of refugees to access self-employment. As mentioned above the Refugees Act recognizes all refugee rights captured in international conventions that Kenya is party to.

Refugees in Kenya need a work permit to engage in any economic activity. The work permit is issued under the authority of the Kenya Citizenship and Immigration Act, 2011 as a Class M work permit and is issued for free to those refugees who qualify for it. A refugee needs a refugee certificate as proof of recognition of his status and a support letter from the DRA in order to apply for the work permit. This means that the right to work is only reserved for asylum seekers that have already been officially recognized as refugees and that have the necessary documentation to prove such recognition.

However, according to the research findings, there are hindrances to the access of this right by refugees. A total of 23% of the households stated that they were employed in the economy working as manual labourers and incentive workers, but only 2% of them confirmed having Class M work permits, while 33% indicated that they did not have a permit. Many of the respondents refused to respond to this question because they felt that providing such information would put them at ‘risk’. As
a conclusion, it remains unclear how many refugees possess the necessary documentation to work. What is known though is that the confirmed cases possessing it are few and exceptional and do not correspond to the number of those actually working.

That only 2% stated that they have such permit means that a majority of refugees may be working unlawfully in Nairobi which may pose a major challenge for their protection. Section 53 of the Kenya Citizenship and Immigration Act states:

A person not being a citizen of Kenya, engages in any employment, occupation, trade, business or profession, whether or not for profit or reward, without being authorized to do so by a work permit, or exempted from this provision by regulations made under this Act... commits an offence.

In other words, a refugee or an asylum seeker, engaging in any economic activity as prescribed by section 53 without a work permit, commits an offence. Refugees are not exempted from this provision under the Kenya Citizenship and Immigration Regulations, 2012 as these regulations reiterate the need for a Class M work permit for one to engage in any economic activity. If found guilty of this offence, the fine is up to Ksh.500, 000 or 3 years in prison or both.

Lack of information concerning legal requirements was found to be one of the reasons for the non-possession of work permits among the refugees. One of the participants for instance stated ‘I didn’t know that I needed a work permit, I just go and work to survive.’ Moreover, they were visibly surprised when told that the work permit is free of charge. This response shows that ignorance of the law is a serious hindrance to the access of the right to work among refugees. This finding corroborates a similar finding in a study conducted by the IRC (2013, p.31). The report narrates an incident during which one of the respondents, a pastor, proudly spotted his church’s registration paper claiming that it was a work permit.

Administrative challenges were also among the issues raised by the refugees as reasons for lacking the crucial documentation. A respondent stated that the process of getting a work permit is marred by administrative challenges. ‘One has to wait for long periods before getting a letter from DRA in support of the permit. Getting the permit from the Immigration Department is also another huddle. I would rather just work and hope not to get caught.’

Lack of recognition documents was cited as yet another hindrance to access to work permits by refugees. Some are still waiting for the refugee certificate. ‘I don’t have a mandate (UNHCR Refugee Mandate) and therefore cannot get an alien card (Refugee Certificate). Without this card I cannot apply for the permit.’ This respondent represents the asylum seekers in Kenya who cannot access work because of the legal requirement to possess proof of recognition before a work permit is issued. According to RCK (2014, p.25) asylum seekers can wait up to 5 years to get a mandate. This means that an asylum seeker may have to wait for up to 5 years before being able to legally work in the country.

Finally the fear of being forcibly taken back to the refugee camps affects refugees’ decision to go and get work permits. ‘How can we apply for this work permit when the Government has ordered us back to the camps? Wouldn’t I just be selling myself out?’ said one respondent. He was referring to the order by the Cabinet Secretary for Interior and Coordination of National Government that all refugees and asylum seekers in urban areas report to the camps. This was preceded by the official gazettement of Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps as the official designated areas where refugees and asylum seekers are to be hosted. It is a criminal offence to be outside these designated areas
without a movement pass punishable by imprisonment of a maximum of 6 months or a fine of a maximum of Ksh. 20,000 or both. However, as our respondents revealed, many are reluctant to move to the camps as per the directive. A reason behind this could be the fact that a vast majority of them have lived in an urban area in their country of origin and therefore felt more comfortable in an urban setting in Kenya or that Nairobi was their first port of call. What is more, 88% of them have never experienced camp life ever since they entered the country. These refugees came directly to Nairobi, where they were registered, before the designated areas were officially recognized. A total of 55 (9%) households left the camps to come to Nairobi for reasons of health, education opportunities and livelihoods.
5 Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

Refugees have been shown to be capable of earning their own living. Our findings reveal that 57% of refugees rely on some form of economic activity. Moreover, refugees owning businesses have created employment for both refugees and Kenyans, the latter being the biggest beneficiaries of these jobs as they make up 49% of the work force. This result indicates that refugees, in this way, do contribute to the economic wellbeing of the nation. In the same breath, the result seems to debunk certain myths on refugee residence in urban areas. The first myth is that refugees are fully relying on the donations of NGOs and cannot fend for themselves. This has been demonstrated to be inaccurate. Only 3% of the urban refugees exclusively rely on social assistance for their upkeep in Nairobi. This means the vast majority (97%) fend for themselves either through businesses or through remittances.

Another myth that appears to have been debunked is the one concerning the lavishness of refugee incomes. As stated earlier, this appears to be a flawed notion as a majority of refugees (85%) earn between Ksh. 0-50,000 with a monthly average expenditure of Ksh. 30,876. What is more, the level of savings among refugees has been shown to be low. Refugees attribute this to the inadequacy of their income. With these figures and low rates of savings one can hardly state that refugees are among the wealthiest foreign nationals in Kenya.

In spite of the encampment policy Kenya has adopted since 1990, this study found that refugees have the right to freedom of movement in accordance to the laws that apply to refugees in Kenya. It has also found that refugees have the right to access work permits that allow foreign nationals to legally work in the country. However, the continued emphasis on encampment and its strict enforcement poses a serious obstacle to accessing required documentation, ultimately denying refugees the right to legally work in Kenya. Work permits are only issued in Nairobi which discourages urban refugees as they are afraid of being taken to the camps where seeking a work permit is not among the grounds of exemption for a refugee to move outside them.
5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.2.1 Government of Kenya

- Develop a strategy to address the large pending caseload on RSD process and implement it in conjunction with UNHCR and other stakeholders to ensure that asylum seekers whose asylum claims are yet to be reviewed are fast tracked to enable them access the work permit and other financial services such as loans;

- Ensure that DRA has enough human and financial resources to evaluate asylum claims expeditiously in order to enable beneficiaries acquire other necessary documents such as work permits as well as financial services;

- Review the legal regime on taxation making provisions for refugees to be registered as tax payers and make this information available and accessible to them.

- Engage more with refugees through business forums and other avenues to explore how best to increase their contribution to the Kenyan economy;

- Enforce targeted movement restriction for refugees suspected of being involved in criminal activity rather than a blanket encampment policy;

- Ensure that the Refugees Act, 2006 is generally fully implemented and particularly the operationalization of screening mechanisms for asylum seekers and greater access to work permits for refugees;

- Develop and implement a national asylum policy that among other things provides procedures on how to apply for and assist refugees on acquisition of work permits.

5.2.2 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and NGOs

- Develop and implement a strategy in conjunction with the Government of Kenya to address the large pending caseload on RSD process to ensure that asylum seekers whose asylum claims are yet to be reviewed are reviewed in order for them to access the work permit;

- Sensitize refugees on the legal requirements on acquisition of work permits through community awareness forums, dissemination of information in the legal aid and outreach clinics and production and dissemination of information, education and communication (IEC) materials on the subject;

- Provide legal and technical assistance to refugees seeking work permits at the DRA and Immigration Department;

- Seek to integrate refugee business owners into the Kenya National Chamber of Commerce so that they can benefit from its services;

- Lobby the Government to increase access to Class M work permits through employing targeted restriction of movement rather than a blanket encampment policy;

- Raise awareness among the Kenyan public on the facts of refugee/asylum seekers livelihoods to counter negative assumptions;

- Provide a platform where refugees and the host community can mingle and learn about each other’s culture which will foster deeper understanding between them and reduce xenophobic attitudes among the Kenyan population;
• Raise awareness among refugees on registration as tax payers and their legal obligation to pay taxes to the Government of Kenya;

• Lobby financial institutions to create credit packages for refugee and asylum seeker entrepreneurs in order for the latter to grow their businesses.

5.2.3 Refugees and asylum seekers

• To ensure that they comply with their duty of seeking necessary permits before they engage in any business engagements;

• To organize themselves into a commercial lobby group that includes all refugees engaged in business activity. The lobby group will provide a useful platform to negotiate with the government and other stakeholders on improving working conditions for refugees in Kenya;

• Engage with other established commercial associations such as Kenya Chamber of Commerce to improve their bargaining power for the improvement of access to work permits for refugees and their greater inclusion in the Kenyan economy
6 REFERENCES


Economic contribution of refugees in Kenyan urban areas: a Nairobi case study

Name of enumerator:______________________________________________________________

Location of household (neighbourhood):____________________________________________

SECTION I: BIO-DATA

1. What is your nationality?
   a. Somali
   b. Ethiopian
   c. Eritrean
   d. Rwandan
   e. Burundi
   f. South Sudanese
   g. Other (specify): _________________________
   h. Congolese

2. How many members of the household have UNHCR Mandate or DRA Refugee Certificate? How many do not have it?
   a. No. of those with docs: __________
   b. No. of those without docs: __________

3. Of those that do not have a mandate or refugee certificate, how many have an appointment/waiting card how many do not?
   a. With: ________________
   b. Without: ________________

4. For those without appointment/waiting cards, why don’t they have them?

5. Where were you first issued with an appointment/waiting card?
   a. Nairobi
   b. Dadaab
   c. Kakuma
   d. Other (specify): ________________

6. If you were issued with waiting cards in Dadaab or Kakuma, why did you move away from the camps?
   a. Security concerns
   b. Livelihood opportunities
   c. Health issues
   d. Education opportunities
   e. Adventure
   f. Other (specify): ________________

7. Did you have a movement pass when you left?
   a. Yes
   b. No

8. If you left the camps without a movement pass, why did you not get one?

9. How long has the household resided in Kenya as refugees?
   a. 0-5 years
   b. 6-10 years
   c. 11-15 years
   d. 16-20 years
   e. More than 20 years
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10. How long have you resided in Nairobi?</td>
<td>a. 0-5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. 6-10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. 11-15 years</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d. 16-20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e. More than 20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Who is the head of the household?</td>
<td>a. Married parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Single parent</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Sibling (young adult 18-25 years)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d. Sibling (minor 13-18 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e. Sibling (minor below 13 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>f. Other (specify):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. What setting did the household use to live in the country of origin?</td>
<td>a. Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Does anyone in the household have any vulnerabilities?</td>
<td>a. Physical disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Mental disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. LGBTI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d. Other (specify):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SECTION II: INCOME DATA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. What is the household’s source of income? (tick as many as apply)</td>
<td>a. Formal employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Informal employment e.g. washing clothes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Business profits (owns a business)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d. Social assistance from NGOs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e. Remittances from family members abroad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>f. Other (specify):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. How much money does the household earn in a month?</td>
<td>a. Below Ksh.10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Ksh.10001 – 30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Ksh.30,001 – 50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d. Ksh.50,001 – 70,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e. Above Ksh.70,001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. In the last 6 months have you received any type of assistance from</td>
<td>a. Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNHCR or other NGOs?</td>
<td>b. No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. If yes, what type of assistance did you receive?</td>
<td>a. Money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Food items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Medical care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d. Skills/business training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e. Business grants/microloans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>f. Legal services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>g. Other (specify):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. How many members of the household engage in any livelihood</td>
<td>a. At least 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>activities?</td>
<td>b. More than one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Has your livelihood activity changed from when you left your</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>country of origin? If yes why?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
20. What assets, if any, do you own in Kenya?  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asset</th>
<th>Estimate value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Land</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. House</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Business</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Shares</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Machinery</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Car/motorcycle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Livestock</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Other (specify):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

21. Do you own a business or self-employed or are you employed?  

- a. Business/self-employed (go to section III)
- b. Employed (formal/informal) (go to section IV)
- c. None (no livelihood activity)

SECTION III: FOR BUSINESS OWNERS/SELF EMPLOYED

22. What type of business/self-employment activity do you engage in?  

- a. Mini store/supermarket
- b. Kiosk
- c. Food related business
- d. Hair salon
- e. Tailoring
- f. Transportation (taxi, bodaboda etc)
- g. Other: ________________

23. Other than the owner of the business, how many people does the activity employ?  

24. What is the nationality and number of these employees? (circle where applicable and give the number)  

- a. Kenyan: ________________
- b. Somali: ________________
- c. Ethiopian: ________________
- d. Eritrean: ________________
- e. Congolese: ________________
- f. Rwandese: ________________
- g. Burundian: ________________
- h. South Sudanese: ________________
- i. Other (specify): ________________

25. Did you receive any financial assistance in setting up the business/self-employment activity? (if yes go to Q.26, if no go to Q.27)  

- a. Yes
- b. No

26. Where did you receive this assistance?  

- a. Kenyan financial institution
- b. UNHCR/NGO
- c. Family/friends in Kenya
- d. Family/friends outside Kenya
- e. Other (specify): ________________

27. How did you manage to set up the business without any assistance?  

28. Who are the main customers for your business?  

- a. Kenyans
- b. Refugees from your nationality
- c. Refugees from other nationalities

29. Do you feel that there is a business conducive environment in Nairobi? Please provide reasons for your response  

- a. Yes
- b. No

Explain: ____________________________
30. What do you think/feel are the challenges facing your business as a refugee?

31. In what ways have you tried to cope with the challenges to your business?

SECTION IV: FOR THOSE EMPLOYED

32. What type of employment do members of this household have? (For those who are employed)

- a. Skill-based e.g. engineer, doctor etc
- b. Unskilled/manual labour
- c. Incentive work in NGOs
- d. Other: ______________________

33. Is your employer Kenyan or a refugee/asylum seeker?

34. Does the employed member of the household possess a work permit? (if yes go to Q.35, if no go to Q.36)

- a. Yes
- b. No

35. How did the household member(s) get the work permit?

36. Why doesn’t the household member(s) have a work permit?

37. What are the biggest challenges faced by the employed member of the household in earning a living?

SECTION V: EXPENDITURE

38. On average, how many Kenyan shillings did the household spend in the last 6 months on the following goods and services?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Amount spent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Rent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Utilities (electricity &amp; water)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Food</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Clothing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. School fees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Healthcare</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Transportation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Business taxes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Salary taxes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j. Donations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k. Communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l. Remittances to family and friends in Kenya</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m. Remittances to family and friends outside Kenya</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n. Bribes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>o. Other: ______________________</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### SECTION VI: SAVINGS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>39. Do you periodically set aside money for savings?</td>
<td>a. Yes       b. No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explain:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. Where do you keep this savings?</td>
<td>a. Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Rotating saving/loan group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Mobile phone (M-pesa/M-shwari)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d. At home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e. Investments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>f. Other (specify):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41. How do you utilize your savings?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42. As a refugee/asylum seeker what are the biggest challenges you face in saving money?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### SECTION VII: OTHER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>43. Given the opportunity, would you consider being registered as a Kenyan citizen?</td>
<td>a. Yes       b. No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44. Please provide a brief explanation for your answer above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45. Is there anything else you would like to add?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>